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THE BORZOI POCKET BOOKS :—XXV

THESE MEN, THY FRIENDS

The Borzoi Pocket Books

• XXV •

Edward Thompson

These Men thy Friends

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MANUFACTURED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO STORM JAMESON AND GUY CHAPMAN

PREFACE

A novel should need no preface. But I have taken a path by which it will be hard to avoid offence to men whom I respected. I could, no doubt, have written of men and battles vaguely—of men without rank or office, of battles without geography. But I have preferred to write what has, I hope, some verisimilitude to the facts of a dozen years ago. I have placed my battles where battles were fought, my men in positions that men held. In writing of the last Battle of Sannaiyat I have even gone so far as to consult a copy of every message that came over the 'phone to the brigadier most intimately concerned; the day after the Battle, I promised him that one day I would make use of it. But I did not feel myself bound to follow my notes except in essentials.

I have given myself freedom where men were concerned. The 'Loamshires,' for example, are a kind of regiment that has existed; but, lest readers should assume that I think all regiments to be of this kind or should identify them with some one particular regiment, I have sent them away from Sannaiyat in late December, 1916, *and represented the Leicestershires as coming there. The Leicestershires, of course, were at Sannaiyat all along. And when we come to individuals, I have given my characters definite commands and positions, have said that this fictitious character was A. P. M. or*

D.A.D.M.S. at such-and-such a place on a certain date, although I know well who actually held that post there and then. Readers who knew Mesopotamia in 1916 *and* 1917 *must please set by their individualised knowledge and allow me to people its camps and battlefields afresh. They must not try to track me to my sources; for, as John Wesley said of admirers who tried to 'mend' his verses, they really are not able.*

One other matter. I have not been careful to make my characters keep to orthodox opinion. If they have spoken freely of such national heroes as Townshend and Maude, it is because my friends, both in 1916 *and in* 1927, *have done the same. The novelist who writes of the Napoleonic Wars is absolved from the expectation that he will make his characters speak only orthodoxy. I cannot wait until a hundred years have gone by since the War that I knew. We already have our official and authorised histories of the great events and great men of our own War; the writers had before them a wealth of material which makes their serious and measured judgments very important. But my experience has been that men who take part in events both at the time and long after sometimes express opinions unlike those which are ultimately—no doubt, rightly—accepted as canonical.*

CHAPTER ONE

1

THEY hung about the front door to Mesopotamia all morning, transhipped at last to a river-steamer and crossed the bar.

2

The Gulf had been a horror of unstirring water, windless and sun-glazed. A man had died from the heat. The skipper, finding that Thomas Kenrick in civil life—' but what are you in *real* life ? ' as the Army used to ask earnestly, scanning you in your wartime mufti, with its temporary stars or stripes—was a medical missionary, impressed him for the burial service. He had not bothered to ask his denomination, or if he were ordained—as a matter of fact, Kenrick was not ; he had handed him a prayerbook, and half a dozen of them had gone to the lower deck. Kenrick had shortened the service to a point that was almost indecent—the ship's officers and orderlies impatiently standing round noted the fact, and their subconscious selves approved. ' Decent fellow for a padre—common sense—reads like a man, too, with a

man's straightforward tones—is a doctor—doesn't simply gammon a living out of old women, by telling them yarns.' Even so, for all his snipping of the service, the printed words began a dance on the page, jumping like so many tiny, meaningless devils. The brain felt faintingly out to catch their import and pass it on to the muscles of speech; but the brain was a top that spun dizzily. Kenrick asked the skipper, 'Will you finish, sir?'; and, thrusting the book from him, went down like a log. The skipper did *not* finish; like everyone else, he had had enough. In one crowded minute, the corpse splashed overboard, and the mourners stampeded to the upper deck, carrying 'the padre' with them. Thank God! the engines were going again! It was the only disturbance of that oily, stagnant air—air which to Kenrick had seemed to be a spirit, wideawake and sullen, watching for a blow at these fools disturbing it. It had struck, and snatched the life of an obscure unit in the hundreds of human ciphers that the boat carried. This movement of the ship was nothing, nothing at all. Yet enough—an exact sufficiency, where with one atom less astir it would have failed—enough to keep man's breath in his nostrils.

In the river-steamer, they climbed over both bars, and entered the river. Kenrick was better now, he was at the rails, watching the face of this new land shape itself out of mists. Schererazade, Harun al-Rashid, Sindbad the Sailor, Nineveh, Nebuchad-

nezzar, Layard, Havelock thrusting towards Mohammerah—like a *djinn* dissolving into desert dust, the composite spectre formed of all these faded, and a new face began to look at him, warily. This land was guarded, that Gulf was patrolled by demons—not the shrieking fiends that walked the horns of Gadara that overtop the Lake, or that tormented the monk in his cell, but silent and invisible. Around the Poles the solitude must watch just so, inimical to man's life, with freezing hands watching its chance. They had passed the fiends, paying a life; now the land was itself watching them.

The troops, with few exceptions, lay on deck exhausted and almost unconscious. But they would live until they landed, and they would recover sufficiently to be flung into the battle with Turk and disease. Already there was a quickening of the air, as the river slowly narrowed. That quickening was well below the perception-point of other lands. But where the whole of existence is subnormal the body develops subnormal senses. Hour after hour, the steamer crept past reedbeds, creeks, and backwaters innumerable; past flat pastures where Old Testament shepherds fed their flocks; past forests of date palms. It passed the *Ecbatana* and her two companion ships, sunk to stay our gunboats—but the seas and river-currents had swung them aside and left a waterway. It toiled past battlefields of the last two years, Fao and Sahain and Sahil; past the oil-plant of Aberdan;

past Mohammerah and the Karun winding dark and shark-infested beneath its trees. It was late afternoon when they reached Busra.

Here the whole population, that was not bedridden, appeared to be at the waterside. It was a hospital-crowd, seemingly of all nations—fantastically garbed, listlessly cheerful. The patients wore night dress of great variety and beauty. 'I could flirt with *that*,' said the chief engineer, Macpherson, looking with admiration at an officer's kimono. The ship's doctor, luckier, recognised a sister, a large, healthy-looking girl, with good-humoured, lively, florid face. They chatted for a few minutes, before she went off. 'Damned good girl, that,' he told Kenrick. 'Beastly job. Filthy climate. No fun. But she just carries on. Hasn't gone sick once in six months. Always cheery.'

The engineer's eye followed her indifferently. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth, and spat into the stream. 'Casement swings to-morrow,' he said.

Williams, the doctor, growled his approval. 'Damned good thing! The best we've done since the War started. I'd like to go in to him every half-hour this evening, and remind him of to-morrow.'

Kenrick recoiled—then wondered how, if at all, his own attitude differed from his companion's, apart from the crude indecency with which Williams expressed himself. But what—his mind sheered away from its first question—what has decency of

thought and speech got to do with decency of action? Precious little. If this had been a well-knit world, then the mind whose movements are clean and just and lovely would be endowed with the hands that work with skill. But it is not. Williams' language and thoughts were foul—they weren't simply foul, they were selfish and grossly and habitually ungenerous to others. But he was a first-rate doctor for the varied needs of a ship that on alternate journeys carried masses of humanity sick in mind and body. He was coming on to Busra now to arrange for another huge evacuation of wretchedness. Has there ever been such an accumulation of misery and despair as was swept down to Bombay from the Gulf, in those first seven months of 1916? A beaten army, knowing that every sort of folly had been in high place over it—aching, with its bodies a prey to disease, and its minds an inner despair sucking at the wearied limbs. But Williams had done his job, saving lives that many a reasonably competent doctor would have lost.

Kenrick had already argued Casement's affair out. He was not prepared to accept the delighted discovery that the ex-consul's war against the rubber trade had all been a fraud and self-advertisement. Undoubtedly, counsel for the defence claimed, and the judge nodded, the man was an idealist—*had* been, rather, the judge corrected. The correction was necessary, for without it how could one visualise to-morrow's scene and keep equanimity? Yes, had been; but he was an

idealist who had gone wrong. Idealists, the judge reminded the court, have a way of doing that. They start well, with the best intentions. But they have no judgment, no . . . no . . . the judge paused in summing up, feeling for the right word; counsel for the prosecution supplied it—thank you—yes, *balance* was the word I wanted. No balance, no sense of proportion. And then vanity intervenes, when somebody praises them. And they go wrong. Go wrong much worse than we who are not idealists. The upshot of which is, it is better not to be idealists, let us thank God that we are in no danger of becoming idealists. The trouble is, idealists are not logical. No, it isn't that. They are too logical, as the mad are; if you are too logical, you become illogical. Idealists do a lot of mischief.

But it was necessary to be sure that this idealist had gone wrong, not merely mischievously, but ignobly. So one reminded oneself that he had tried to tempt Irish soldiers, prisoners of the Hun and helpless, into a course of action that would forfeit their lives if England ever caught them. That was a shabby trick; and to-morrow's dawn would open on an act of justice, when it opened on the pinioning and procession. He had tried to do what some of our own officers were now doing in Arabia, where they were building up a Hejaz army to fight the Turk, an army trained and led by Arab soldiers that we had captured. Fortunately, Kenrick did not know what

was beginning to happen in the Hejaz; Lawrence was not yet a household name, 'the uncrowned King of Arabia.' One says, fortunately, for Kenrick's mind was not political or subtle, and might not have been able to see the difference between the two cases—that the Irish had taken advantage of the stress that had fallen upon England, their kind and generous, even if somewhat slow-moving, overlord, while the Arabs were being welded into an army of liberation, to free their native land from alien rule. Even as it was, Kenrick's mind, illogical and foolishly sentimental, in its innermost recesses, whispered faintly that there had been retrogression, as well as progress, in civilization during these magnificent years. We were fighting, sternly and with lavish gift of our best, for the rights of small nations, for the sanctity of the written word, for the freedom of the whole world. But we were hanging a man for high treason—and under an Act of—was it Henry the Seventh? Kenrick caught the rebel whisper, he dived suddenly towards it, into himself—and the self that had hardly spoken was gagged and put under hatches.

The voice of Williams roused him. 'Dreaming, padre? Looking at that nurse over there? Mustn't do that. Well... so long. I've got to make my stores up, and see the D.M.S. Then down that bloody Gulf again.'

The chief engineer continued smoking and spitting and gazing—gazing and spitting and smoking.

Kenrick came alongside, and asked him, 'What's all this crowd doing here?'

'They always come here. Nowhere else to go, nothing else to do. They're watching us.'

'My hat, we're not much to watch!'

'We're new, that's something. That's the way the damned watch, padre, when a fresh gang come to Hell. "Poor devils! they don't know what they're in for!"'

But the *Bushire*, like a lazy beauty who awakens to the admiration of the world, bestirred herself. These people were watching her; she would give them something to watch. Presently she drew all eyes, as she entertained that riverside crowd. Deep in her hold, all through that wretched, lurching journey across the monsoon-heaving waters of the Indian Ocean and the breathless, stifling crawl up the Gulf, the *Viceroy* had carried seven hundred convicts, now herded on the *Bushire's* lower deck. They had volunteered from Indian jails, for service in Mesopotamia, and ten years were remitted from their sentences, for every two spent in this evil land. In 'real life' most of them had been murderers; murder is a thing that happens quickly and easily in India, and its consequences are rarely capital.

And now the ark poured forth its fluttering captives, while a band played an accompaniment on shore. They had been miserable almost to death during the voyage; they came now dazed, wearing for the first

time in their lives boots—boots that were new, with slippery soles. The disembarkation planks were of steel; and as each squad of these unwary, shining-footed ones reached the slope, the first would slide, stagger, clutch at the air, then clatter down. Lying, he collected his following comrades, and a human snowball avalanched ashore. Unsmiling and without comment, the crowd watched them; and the band raised a clamour of exultant music.

Williams reappeared with a paper in his hand. 'You're going to Joseph in the Bulrushes,' he told Kenrick. 'Official style, Number Fifteen Reinforcements Camp, Magil.'

3

Evening was setting on the dategroves as Kenrick reached his temporary destination. For a brief space that hard world took on extreme loveliness and glamour. Sunset was fleeting—splashes and lines of brilliant red that disappeared almost in their outleap—the sword-stabs of some invisible warrior; then a green glimmer came between the palm-columns. Then darkness. Everywhere was a mist of mule-carts trudging through the heavy dust; that dust twinkled in the sun's last level rays.

Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Arthur Mason, I.M.S., was sitting before his mess-tent. The rigours of life have made the stubborn texture of ironwood and of oak; they have also developed the clinging liana,

which the tempest swings and tosses but cannot tear. Joseph's ability had been sufficient to take him into the one career open to the Eurasian that leads to full saheb status, the Indian Medical Service; thereafter, both inherited slackness and the protective amiability of the weak had made him take the line of least work and least resistance. He kept his dignity intact by a pose of easy good-fellowship; by going three-quarters of the distance that separated him from the pure-blood Englishman of low rank, he obviated the risk that impudence might take the whole gap in one stride. This pose of good-fellowship, being in essence an appeal, was understood, and won a good-humoured tolerance. He was content.

The ashen face grimaced into official friendliness; and he introduced Kenrick to Martyn, the Church of England padre seated beside him. This was that Martyn who was afterwards sent to India in disgrace, for having written frankly (and also, which is not always the case with frankness, truthfully) about certain shortcomings in the management of the war betwixt the ancient rivers. This was in private letters to his friends; but the Church, most of all its Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, sinned in forgetting its alliance with the State, and the stronger conspirator used Martyn as a warning.

But Kenrick liked Martyn at once. Most people liked Martyn. He was not a scholar, and his mind was neither well-stored nor quick. But charm is

nothing but vitality and the quality of not thinking eternally about oneself; and Martyn wasted very little time on himself and his own concerns. This was why he could ask an unknown tommy how he was, without being suspected of patronage or a deliberate will to be Christian. Within fifteen minutes of Kenrick's arrival, another newcomer, a Nonconformist chaplain by name Fletcher, arrived. Martyn's greeting was, 'Then you belong to me, because I also am a padre'; and the straightforward kindness of his words shone in his eyes. We know that it is as hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Martyn's Christianity had passed unstraitened through three needles. He was a priest of a State Church, he was a member of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, he was an army chaplain with a major's crown on his shoulders.

Kenrick's stay with 'Joseph in the Bulrushes' was a brief but highly comic episode. To the two permanent members of this mess, the commandant and chaplain, their experience must have been that of watchers stationed in a lighthouse when the great migrations take place. Dusk by dusk there was a rushing of wings; and by the dim aura about the central flare might be seen all manner of queer birds, dazed as they flighted to land, pausing here for a night until the new sun warmed their frozen feathers. Some twenty new members joined the camp the same

evening as Kenrick; and 'Joseph,' surveying the fluttering cohort with an eye made wise and wary by forty years of watchful sojourn in this wilderness of a world, singled out Kenrick and appointed him Adjutant.

In after-days, when the trivial episode of his stay in No. 15 Reinforcements Camp recurred to memory, Kenrick marvelled at many things. The members paid five rupees a day for messing; in return they received bread and meat, and the privilege of buying as much sugar, tea, jam, butter, whisky, and limejuice as they wished. In his ignorance supposing that a tin of jam opposite him at breakfast was rations, an officer reached for it; but Martyn flung a protecting paw about it, and said, 'Private Property.' The officer apologised red-facedly, and Martyn insisted on his having some of the jam. Colonel Joseph's prices for whisky and limejuice, Kenrick afterwards found out, were twenty per cent. above those charged at canteens; no doubt the orderlies who brought the bottles had been tipped royally, which explains this discrepancy. The tide of 'reinforcements,' sweeping through and across the mess, left a vast debris of bottles paid for but only half-consumed; these were generously resold at half-price, which saved many officers from the expense of buying full bottles. And yet, in later days, to Kenrick reviewing the evidence, it seemed likely that Colonel Mason feared that his pension would be insufficient for his old

age to live upon when he retired from serving the Empire.

There were few combatant officers in the twenty who joined with Kenrick. Most of them were doctors, vets, dentists. One of the last especially interested him, a voluble cockney whose sole training seemed to have been in extraction. He explained that this was the branch in which he had 'specialised'; and Kenrick visualised him as tramping about Mesopotamia with a huge pair of forceps.

'What terrors round him wait!
Amazement in his van, with Flight combined,
And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind.'

This artist was full of his grievances. He had been nearly torpedoed, and he considered it scandalous that he had not been convoyed through the Mediterranean by the Grand Fleet, now wasting time in the North Sea. If the Allies lost the War, they had only themselves to thank. They had lost Kitchener, by one such carelessness already; that might well have been a lesson to them. He had other woes, as deeply felt. Not once, since his enrolment late in the national effort, had he been adequately fed or provided with his proper comforts. His stay in the 'Bulrushes,' though short, was long enough for his conception of discomfort to be enlarged; he was one of a not inconsiderable band, men and women whose War experiences enabled them throughout their after-life to feel that they had once undergone terrible

suffering for the sake of their country. But he was amusing, in a boring sort of way. He had the cockney wit, which saw the Persian Gulf turtles as 'like skytes' and 'gryte dining-room tybles,' and the bobbing river-tortoises as 'like empty beer-bottles floating dahn'—which is very much what they do resemble. On the second morning after his arrival he disappeared upcountry, taking his forceps with him. Let us hope that the Veterinary Corps got hold of him. The mule is a nasty animal, and we need not waste any pity on it.

Kenrick chafed at delay in Busra, and wondered what chance he had of 'getting to the Front.' 'Joseph' and Martyn stared, and exchanged glances of amused amazement. 'This is quite near enough to the Front for the padre and me,' said the former. 'We don't want any more war than we have here.' And, indeed, they had this semblance of war, that an Indian sentry every night paced by their camp, and challenged anyone who left it. 'H'lt! oo go's dar?' He challenged Martyn, the night Kenrick came; and Martyn's voice was heard replying as to a child, 'Don't be silly! don't be silly!' The abashed sepoy let him by with this unorthodox answer, instead of exercising his right to bayonet him. 'Joseph' was much amused, and told the tale at every meal thereafter.

Kenrick spent three days in the Bulrushes. He was lucky, meeting in the town an old schoolfellow,

Jameson, now a lieutenant in the Midlanders. Jameson had a tepid flirtation on with a girl in one of the base hospitals; he was a generous soul, and took Martyn out in a bellum with her. The winding creeks, with their kingfishers and bee-eaters, were some atonement for the town's squalor, the desolation of the immense wastes of sand, the hellish heat, the glare from the water; and Mary Leycester was a nice enough girl, with a charming pucker of her brows when she got earnest.

Jameson introduced him also to Ashar Barracks. Most of the miscellaneous mess here seemed to be living in a high fever. Conversation was rattled and jerky, humour was at a low ebb and solely personal. 'Tommy's in a sulk to-day; he was driven into the stables with the mules yesterday. The man didn't notice he'd a hat on.' Life was too glittering and arid, the uncomfortable sun killed the will to jest. They were officers of a badly beaten army, just come through a great disaster, and not one had any confidence in the Indian Government or the Higher Command. Existence was a greasy flux of transference from filthy billets, generally named 'Flea Villa' or 'Bug Cottage,' to uneatable meals; and back again. Summons upcountry came as a jail-release. As a preparation for the Mesopotamian War, residence in Busra was admirable; everyone was unfeignedly glad to get to the Front. Even if he had been there before, he was glad; there can

be no higher testimony to its value as a training-ground.

On the evening of the 7th, an undersized but stocky private appeared before Kenrick, with his credentials, a scrap of paper that instructed Private Johns to report to Captain Kenrick, R.A.M.C., as his servant. An hour later, Signals sent in a message that Captain Kenrick was attached to the Hyderabad Division for duty, and was to proceed upstream with all despatch, passage having been allotted to him on P25.

CHAPTER TWO

1

KENRICK and his batman drew rations at a derelict S. and T. office, where they met the Nonconformist chaplain, on the same errand and posted to the same division. Kenrick and Fletcher pooled resources and chits, striking an alliance for the journey. They amassed a certain amount of tea and sugar, inextricably mingled together in the same brown sack, a lot of bully beef, three tins of maconochie—the times of ignorance were yet with them, and they did not realise how precious these were—and a tin of apple. Fletcher, who had the spiritual setter's gift of nosing out a lost sheep, discovered in the sergeant a lapsed Nonconformist of sorts, and acquired a handful of filthy dates and some *atta* (Indian flour). But they were not dependent on rations. At the poignant moment of departure, Kenrick had learnt from Colonel Joseph that it so happened that he had a small store of tinned fruit and biscuits. It had struck him that this would be a convenience to officers ordered upstream on short notice; they had not time to go to the canteen. He

had very little over and above his own personal needs, so he hoped that Captain Kenrick would not let the others in the mess know; but to a fellow-medical he could spare a few tins, he thought. Yes, he was sure he could. Kenrick could have bitten his tongue out when he betrayed the Colonel's confidence to Fletcher, which he did in an unguarded moment; but it transpired that Fletcher had received the same surprising information and assistance. So their batmen lugged their united stores on board P25, dumping their kit in the bows and fixing beds and sandfly nets..

They were awakened by the noise of starting next morning, just as it seemed that sleep had at last begun, after hours of tossing; before the sun rose, P25 began her journey. A humorist, making a semi-official inventory of the vast miscellaneous river-navy of Mesopotamia, once described this noble vessel thus: 'She was built for Lugal-en-nasi, *Patesi* of Lagash, from whom Kudor-lagamar (the Chedorlaomer of *Genesis*) captured her.' The gibe is stale and clumsy; but it is not a libel in its attempt to indicate that P25 had certain drawbacks from which the most modern type of steamer is free. She made wretched progress, after her first triumphant running through the deep tides to Qurna, where Euphrates and Tigris meet. Midway between Qurna and Kut, near Amara, an old canal sucks off half the river, to lose it in enormous marshes, a moiety straining back

through the reedbeds at Qurna. Up this impoverished stretch of uncharted stream, P25 struggled, heavily laden and with dipping barges on either side, puffing like an old woman climbing a steep hill.

But the first day, of easy steaming through abundant water, was a pleasant time. Only the skipper, thinking ahead of the infernal straits to come, had the shadow of foreboding in his eyes as he chatted with his passengers.

Fletcher, as became a divine, was interested in the Biblical associations and ancient history of the land. In original vein, he pointed out to Kenrick that this would be a simply great country for the archaeologist, once the War was over. A voice that was not Kenrick's agreed with him. 'Ay, it wull that. And so wull the Caucasus.'

They turned, to see the figure of the very perfect navvy, complete but for hod of bricks, leaning on the rails beside them. General 'Mandalay' McCleod introduced himself, with that easy straightforwardness that, one imagines, must have marked Napoleon and Alexander. Of all the men that Kenrick ever met, he was the simplest and frankest in his account of himself. Understanding the subject perfectly, he saw no reason for wrapping it in obscurity.

'Ah'm General McCleod. Ah've gotten a vera big name in Burma, or, for that matter, ye'll hear ma name wherever there's surgeons talking aboot the great discoveries of oor time. Ah'm the famous blood-

poisoning specialist, ye ken. Ah've discovered a vera special operation whereby ye cut awa' suspected tissues before there's any chance of an abscess forrrming there. There's no one else can do ma worrrk, but Ah've consented to come oot to this damned country for twa months to advise aboot the hospitals here. The tommies hae a deal o' trouble with blood-poisoning, ye ken. Weel, padre, ye were talking o' the Caucasus, Ah'm thinking.'

Fletcher said that he was not, and repeated the fatuous remark that he actually had made. The great surgeon accepted it gravely.

'Ah'm no saying ye're wrang. There *wull* be a deal o' excavatin' here, nae doot. But it's the Caucasus that's haulding the grrreatest secrets from man.'

Kenrick and Fletcher were silent, pondering on the new light. Mandalay McCleod read their minds for them, and kindly revealed the thought lying inchoate within.

'Ye'll be wondering, nae doot, what brings me, a man o' ma reputation, to this land where they're doing naething save bungle evera damned last thing. Weel, perhaps Ah hope to hae a hand in blocking the bungling, and to save a wheen puir laddies' lives. But ma main pairpose is puirly scienteefic. Ah hae a firrrm hope that presently, when the bunglers have had their day, we shall be pushing on towards Baghdad; and after Baghdad's once taken, there'll be naething to stop us till the Caucasus.'

'Oh, I don't know,' Fletcher demurred. 'It's a fearful distance further; and there are rivers and mountains in between, and tribes that are first-rate at guerilla fighting—the Kurds, for instance.' Being a sound Englishman, Padre Fletcher pronounced the name of the Kurds as if they were the delectable sourness of milk.

The General brushed his objection aside with scorn. 'We'll no be stopped by ony Kurds or suchlike milky stuff, once we find oorsels in Baghdad. It'll be on, Ah'm thinking, on till ye see the snawy taps o' the Caucasus. For there,' he reminded them, 'ye'll be at the vera centre of the hail warld, and be able to stap the Hun from sending supplies to his submarines out East or stirrring up trouble in China.'

Mandalay McCleod in the great heats went of choice not only coatless but barefooted. Badges of rank were superfluous; greatness such as his could take itself for granted, and find itself accepted everywhere. Yet as to his surgical skill, Kenrick discovered, there were those base enough to doubt. On this very ship was an enemy, Major Hart the company's commandant, an Indian Army officer, who knew the General and the district where he practised.

'Great surgeon!' Hart snorted. 'Great humbug! He hasn't washed for twenty years; and when he operates he smokes a cheap cheroot all the time, spilling ash into the wound and murmuring, "All a-septic, all a-septic." He made his name first in

Rangoon, which is stiff with Indians. The Aryan Brother has a great regard for him, because he never uses soap, never spends a pice, and never charges less than a hundred dibs for even looking at you. But anyone who goes to him ought to be certified without examination.'

'Would you certify the whole Higher Command, then?' asked Major Mills, R.A.M.C. 'For they've fetched him out on something absurd in the way of salary and allowances. He's not getting the pittance of us ordinary medicoes.'

The question seemed to deprive Major Hart of all power of speech. 'Certify them?' he said at last. 'Certify them? Everyone above the rank of captain would have been in a madhouse long ago, if the term *lunacy* had any meaning once you got to Mesopotamia! Just because you're new to the place, don't go fooling yourselves. Everyone who's been three months in Mespot is touched in the head. And three months goes by in no time. And as for the Higher Command! How many generals do you suppose we've got rid of, up to date?'

'Do you count brigadiers?'

'Of course. The number's forty-one. They've been—shall we say "evacuated"?'

'Anyway,' said Mills, 'old Mandalay's got a really wonderful operation for preventing blood-poisoning.'

'Wonderful operation for extracting any loose cash you have on your person, or any balance in your

bank. I know a family of natives who had a chap ill. They sent for our navvy friend, and he came loafing along, cheroot in mouth. He didn't even bother to remove it. He just rolled it round and round his mouth—he had a quid of tobacco which he was chewing, temporarily tucked away in his cheek. Then he said, "Ay, ye'll die, ye'll die. Ye'll die a' richt. Ma fee's a hundred rupees." So he collected it, and shambled off.'

'But surely he does operate, Major?' said Kenrick.

'Oh, yes. He shoves crude mercury into you, you roll about in agony for three or four days, and then die.'

'That's hardly fair, Major,' said Mills. 'He's a tousled, filthy old bird, and everyone knows he just amasses the shekels, never spending a pice except for tobacco. But he's got a knack with the knife, such as probably hardly another chap in the world has. He somehow or other managed to turn up when they were holding the last World Conference of Surgeons in New York. When they were discussing operations for removing poisoned tissue, you had one famous johnny after another getting up, and saying cautiously, "Out of twelve operations that I have performed," or "Out of fifteen operations." And then'—Mills grew dramatic, and spread out his hands against that vast, desolate stage of Mesopotamia—'there loomed up this huge, untidy jumbo whom nobody knew, and he said, "Out of feefteen *thousand*

operations that I have pairforrrmed." I'm told it made some sensation.'

'' Swank ! ' snorted the unbeliever.

' No. The old boy had done them.'

2

Anyway, Mandalay McCleod's reputation was sufficiently great for the Government, casting about for some means of increasing the cost of the War, to entice him out to Iraq by the offer of brigadier-general's rank and pay, and compensation for his slumbering practice besides. The money would come to him intact. He slept on the deck, with no bed beneath his blankets ; and in vain, for him, had the Bombay profiteers displayed their innumerable gadgets. Every time he glanced towards Kenrick and Padre Fletcher, he must have felt the involuntary gladness of self-approval that Mr. Shaw tells us is his when he pits his mind against Shakespeare's. What asses the men had been ! Water-softening machines, water-testing machines, filters, clouded spectacles, special camp-chairs——

Fletcher had arranged an ' easy chair,' bought in Bombay at a price commensurate with its alleged virtues. He then sat in it ; the faithless quadruped collapsed resoundingly, in a heap of little splinters. Picking himself up, he saw that it had been painted sticks pinned together. Major Hart, startled by the noise of falling, looked round from his own chair.

'You've been buying from Fleece and Robbery,' he surmised, accurately. 'Why the devil did you go to them, padre? Anyone could have told you they would rook you to your back teeth. Their very name should have warned you.'

Now, extraordinary names are common in Bombay streets. There are the shops of Messrs. Badham Piles, there are Jeejeebhoys, there are—— But Fletcher, the serious and literal-minded, had not noticed the exact name now mentioned. 'Fleece and Robbery'? he queried.

Hart supplied him with the name of which this was the Army variant.

'Better send in a complaint,' suggested Kenrick.

'Better not waste the nation's time,' said Hart. 'You'll only get insolence in return. Once you're up the Gulf, they know the odds are you won't come back; and, if you do, you're not going to be in Bombay long enough to take the matter up. Did they give you any guarantee? No, of course not. War-time, you know; they do their best, but naturally, with all their best workers away at the front and so on and so on—ah, take the whole pack of usual lies as read—they can't prevent an occasional article being a bit below their well-known standard. Well, padre, you've learnt the lesson that some thousands of us have learnt before you. What's it cost you altogether? You look as if you had blue'd a good eight hundred dibs on them. They come *dear* as a

training school, don't they? But I suppose their *average* charge, for teaching a chap to avoid them for the rest of his natural, is somewhere about a hundred dibs. That's the way to look on them,' said Hart, very pleased with himself. 'Look on them as shopkeepers, as most fellows do, and you lose your temper and think they're the biggest thieves that even Bombay in war-time can produce. But look on them as a sort of training-school, teaching you to be about half the ass you were before you took their course, and they seem benefactors and very honest blokes. Padre, I believe I've hit on a principle of the utmost value. We're looking at everything topsy-turvy, that's why we're so fed up. But there's a healthier, happier way, and I'm pointing you to it. F'rinst'nce, don't look on our Mespot generals as soldiers, but as low comedians—and how wonderful, instead of depressing, their performances become!'

But Fletcher, surveying his little mound of matchwood, was not ready for the consolation that divine philosophy can bring.

'I don't see how they can stand out against the shoals of complaints they must get,' he said.

'Why, they *know* they never get a man's custom a second time, so they meet no complaints, but just concentrate on the job in hand, which is dutching the next griffin. If we ran this War half as sensibly as they run their business, it would have been over two years ago. If we ever have what Bottomley's

clamouring for, a *Business* Government, they're the sort of people we shall rope in. We shall then do everybody in the eye all round.'

It was Mandalay McCleod who supplied the moral of the whole affair. Standing over them, majestic, scornful, yet half pitying, he had made Fletcher and Kenrick feel their folly and weakness. He spoke at last.

'If ye're on a campaign,' he said severely, 'it's best to behave as if ye were. Ye've no *need* o' all these fallals and knicknacks. A sojer needs a blanket or twa, but he disna need a bed. The puir tommies hae naething but a rifle and a pack, with a pair o' blankets flung in whiles when the puir devils hae a spell awa' from the trenches.'

Kenrick, glancing towards the tiny cache that marked the great surgeon's kit, and then at his own enormous pile of useless truck, realised that the speaker's practice was as worldly wise as his principles were noble. He had brought not a stick superfluous, not a rag beyond his ultimate needs; as his actions frequently proved, he had not even a handkerchief. And he was without stores of any kind; having drawn the utmost that the Supply and Transport would allow him, he had generously put them in to the skipper, informing the latter that he intended to honour him by sharing his meals. This arrangement met many difficulties, and set his mind free for thought during the voyage.

3

" Above Qurna, datepalms grow scarce, and immense reedbeds jut out from the river. Even zizyph bushes cease, and there is nothing taller than the two foot camelthorn and dwarf mimosa.

Yet the scenery had its charm for unaccustomed eyes, even though Hart, the war-worn soldier returning to the scene of his wounds and loathing, glared at it with a hatred beyond expression in his face. There was always the river, growing gentle and beautiful with evening; there were the mirages, with their strange, faery mockery of life; there were the great spaces, with the reflected green of the bright marsh-growths on the glassy water. An occasional gull broke the mirror, dipping as it flew by; flocks of hoodie crows patrolled the swamps, hoopoes strutted in the glare, bee-eaters and speckled, huge-headed kingfishers swung in and out of holes in the banks. Where some rill strained through rushes to the Tigris, a heron would be waiting in the tiny delta; a grebe or snake-bird would turn its head quickly before it dived; in the lovely, placid ripples of evening, tortoises floated downstream, innumerable black heads that pulled in as they reached the steamer. There were thousands of these at the river-edge, 'hopping the parapet' and plunging in as the wash aroused them. There were scattered Arab encampments, and Arabs of every age were loin-deep

in the Tigris, fishing with splendid success; other Arabs walked beside the boat—it was easy to keep pace with it—offering their tasteless melons for sale. Away on the left were the crosses that crowned Norfolk and Dorset Hills, tiny mounds of battle in Townshend's time, when men had waded and pushed their bellums through these morasses while the shells splashed, for the most part harmlessly.

Those graves were scarcely a twelvemonth old, yet already they seemed to belong to antiquity, a part of that story, fast growing legendary, which gathered round the adventurous army that had gone into captivity from Kut. This was the way that 'Townshend's Regatta' had swept, when seventeen men had taken Amara. Those crosses, silhouetted against the wonderful evening sky, belonged to no legend, Kenrick reflected, but represented living pain and loneliness somewhere. He wondered again about his own youngest brother, due for his first spell in the Flanders trenches. Then his mind went back to his mission station in China. They were a decent set, those Anglican 'fathers' with whom he worked. Very earnest and self-sacrificing; and he had been wrapt round by religion and by the insistent calls of a busy, devoted life. Wrapt round as by a cloak—he began to see this? And from what? From sin, and temptation, and from "the worldly life'—*of course.* But was it also, perchance, from the life of their own age? He talked to Fletcher; and

suddenly he felt a chill breeze upon his spirit, as if part of the cloak had been lifted and as if his Christian community, instead of being the central hearth-fire of the world, were out in cold and isolation. For if Fletcher's universe of discourse could be so narrow and provincial, without its inhabitant having the slightest suspicion of this, might not his own, and that of those earnest priests his colleagues, be narrow and provincial also ?

It was Sunday, the day they left Qurna, and Fletcher held a service, Kenrick reading the lessons. There was a full attendance of the ship's dozen passengers, Mandalay McCleod sitting huge and benignly critical immediately in front of the preacher ; from time to time he nodded, approvingly but with a shadow of misgiving. The Devil also must have been present, for a wild impulse was at Fletcher's shoulder all the time, to bring in the Caucasus mountains. In deference to the Anglican preponderance in the congregation, he used the Prayer-book service. The responses showed that in some of the worshippers the edge of familiarity had been dulled by abstention from worship. ' We bless Thee for our creation, preservation '—' and all the Royal Family,' a fervent voice concluded. Kenrick was glad that the humourless Fletcher was reading the service, and not he. And yet Fletcher's brain was obviously turning from its humdrum highway ; for, as he told Kenrick afterwards, when giving out his

text, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' he had caught Mandalay McCleod's gaze full, and the Almighty alone knew how he had managed not to say, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the Caucasus.'

Probably the Puritans were right, and on the Lord's Day His servants should avoid profane topics. Half-an-hour before the service, Kenrick, who had an interest in natural history, had raised the question of the lion's possible survival in Mesopotamia; Fletcher had stood by unrebukingly.

Hart, whose interests were wide—he seemed to detest soldiering as heartily as he did it well, he was always hankering after a book or someone with some sort of intellectual bee in his bonnet—knew something about the matter. 'In Layard,' he said, 'you read of his suddenly seeing a whole flock of lions wandering about the Tigris or over the ruins of Babylon. They used to be all over these reedbeds, thirty years ago. But not since every one of these Arab fellows had a gun. I've heard that the last Mesopotamian lion was shot by Commander Cowley—you know, the fellow who was killed trying to run the *Julnar* into Kut with provisions—shot just about Sannaiyat, where the Turk put half a dozen bullets into me last April. But I don't believe it's extinct—not altogether; though it will be if the British Army gets a few weeks of peace in this land. There's a yarn that a sapper officer shot one in the marshes by the Wadi, only this March; and when I was in Arab Village—

that's where we're going now—some Buddoos brought a baby lion through, trying to sell it. That argues the existence of pa and ma lions not long ago, don't you think? Over there'—he pointed eastward—'they've got hills rising to ten thousand feet, on the Persian border. Somewhere among their foothills I'm prepared to bet there's still a lion or two.'

It was then that Mandalay McCleod, who like the jungle elephant though massive moved noiselessly, glided by. As he did so, he amplified Hart's guess. 'Or in the Caucasus,' he said.

4

Ezra's Tomb, a lovely blue glazed dome amid emerald shadows hiding its mud walls. They anchored by its palms, for a memorable night. The full moon was a burnished targe in the clear skies; the Arabs in charge of the *mahailas*, light-hearted, sang to a one-stringed fiddle. But the night's central core was discomfort.

Hart, awakened by the tossing of 'the padres,' appeared by their beds. He held a tin.

'Try this. It's kerosene. Rub it over your face; until it dries off the brutes will leave you alone. That is, they'll wake you in another two hours' time. You'll get through the night in shifts so.'

'But I've *got* a sandfly net,' said Fletcher.

'Quite. But does it keep them out? The net that does hasn't been invented. All your net's doing

is to choke you up in a box filled with your own breath.'

Their gratitude moved the good man to flights of cosmogony that were commonly beyond him. 'The Lord let the Devil make Mesopotamia,' he said. 'And he did it when he had a damn sight too much spare time on his hands. No one can say he scamped the job. And he put his best thought into these bloody sandflies. Invisible, crawling feet that leave you feeling unclean, as if every line of your body had been scraped over with sand sticking to a dung-fork. They've red-hot wings and feet; and their claws—don't tell me they haven't claws—are tipped with sulphur from the everlasting fires.'

Next day troubles settled on the doomed boat in a flock. She had reached the Narrows, in which is the Devil's Elbow; the river so twisted and turned that often there were several boats moving—or hoping to move—in almost parallel arms of the one stream, yet hours' sail apart. In places the Tigris was so straitened that, once a boat swung round, it stretched from bank to bank, throttling the current. Then followed shouting, rowing of boats, hammering of pegs on shore and fastening cables. If a cable snaps, it curls across the water like a flying dragon, and cuts men in two.

This day P25 progressed three miles. The landsmen glowered at the skipper, who burned beneath their scrutiny, knowing what a fool they thought

him. At whiles his face grew homicidal; perhaps he overheard things. Hart nicknamed him 'the billiard-player.' 'He's invented a sort of boat-billiards, cannoning off the green.' 'It makes him *cushy*, but no one else,' punned Saxon, his adjutant, a freckled boy who took life more light-heartedly than was right in Mesopotamia.

The Billiard-Player's second-in-command was 'President Diaz,' a person of bloodthirsty countenance and lurid speech. He entertained the passengers with stories of the fighting that had finished. They were gruesome tales of muddling and misery, received by all except Hart with scant belief, but soon to be proclaimed to the whole world by the Mesopotamian Commission. It was a pity that neither the President's appearance nor his gift of colourful, facile narrative inspired the conviction that he was bigotedly truthful; for his story was one in which there was no place for the artist. The naked truth defied embellishment, and the man who valued his reputation for accuracy told it at his risk.

On the fourth day P25 settled herself wearily by a pleasant bank of palms and willows. The Billiard-Player demanded of the universe in general and of 'the padres' in particular, 'What *is* one to do with a boat that simply won't do a damned thing?'

'Sacrifice a fowl over the prows to the old Gods of Babylon,' suggested Kenrick; 'or give the River an Army Biscuit.'

A darker thought flitted over President Diaz's mind. 'It's our padres that are blocking us,' he said.

Towards evening the boat moved again, and passed Qualit Salih, a fine roadstead with bowing willows. All the way now the river was fringed with bowing willows; the *shamal*, 'the date-wind' that ripens the palm-harvests, was blowing hard. Dawn came with a chilly breeze; and from his blankets McCleod observed, 'It wull now vai-ry, between cauld and damned cauld.' After some hours of strain and tug, the ship got off; the General, pointing to the sun at meridian, said, 'We've made *huge* progress; we've left the date-garden'—which had been their halt for the night. At his words the tired and justified boat collapsed on to another sandbank. Yet she was on the edge of deep water, which she found at sunset, gliding on till midnight, under a moon too lovely to be wasted on the human foolishness and wretchedness now infesting this land. To Kenrick the pilot was in league with the old gods who had extorted blood for every inch of their thirsty land; as he plumbed the river's depths he cried out, calling on its ancient Kings. 'Assur-ban-i-pal' was what he said.

The dullness of the way was lit up with improving discourse. Mandalay McCleod had thought deeply and widely, and held theories untrammelled by any traffic with evidence. 'On my soul,' grumbled Hart to Kenrick, whom he had taken to his special friendliness, 'I used to think that next to generals—I don't

count old Mandalay a general,' he explained—'you padres were the biggest asses, for thinking that eminence in your own line entitled you to talk nonsense in every other. But I now know that doctors beat you both. What makes you such confident idiots?'

Kenrick did not argue again the question of whether he was a padre. He said: 'Well, we really *do* know something, you see—whereas the majority of professional jobs seem to require just a knack of swank or talking. We have to do a stiff course; and then we have absolute power over folk. And we *can* help them——'

'It's the power,' Hart decided swiftly, 'the power that makes you so cocksure. It isn't what you know—for you know no more than you did in the year 2000 B.C.'

Mandalay McCleod had been enlightening them on a point of philology. 'It's all a pack o' nonsense,' he warned them, 'this aboot English being a Teutonic language. Ah don't believe either that it's a Latin one. It's sheer Semitic. Ye can tell that by the yarn of Odin coming across Europe. Whaur would he be coming from, tell me that? It couldna be from Teutonic countries, for that's whaur he was going. Aweel, then, he came from the Sooth.'

'From the Caucasus, sir?' interjected Saxon respectfully.

The surgeon looked at him, with a dawn of suspicion

beneath his bushy brows. But Saxon was all that an adjutant should be, awed and listening. 'Ay,' said Mandalay McCleod at last, dryly. 'But, ye see, we've named the days o' the week after him and his gang, which *proves* that the language is Semitic. It's as Semitic,' he concluded, 'as ever Greek or Hebrew.'

5

If this narrative is dreary, the chronicler is succeeding in making the reader realise the Mesopotamian War as it was. There was a deceptive break at Amara, the beauty-spot of Iraq; long, winding reaches and frequent gardens ushered them to its presence, past a bowing frontage of palms and luxuriant mimosas. The *shamal* was blowing great guns, the river was a sea of leaping waves, over which swallows were circling. Everything seemed larger and better than Mesopotamian wont; the dates were in bigger bunches, on finer trees, the willows were bushes, there were limes, pomegranates, figs. But Amara is beautiful only from the river.

The frontier hills of Persia, the Pushti-Kuh, had suddenly marched forward into notice. A cold wind thrust into the *shamal*. 'Evidently from those hills,' said that sprightly observer of the obvious, Padre Fletcher. 'Or from the Caucasus,' the General corrected. This was the last that they heard of that famous range; for Mandalay McCleod, revealing the forgotten fact that he possessed a coat, climbed

ashore and left them. He was to begin his mission here, with the dwellers in Amara.

At evening they went on, through the exquisite reaches. The wind was now a gale, the palms dancing in visible enjoyment. Terns and swallows accompanied the boat, kingfishers perched on willow-roots or flew ahead screaming and pouncing. 'Assur-ban-i-pal,' the pilot cried to the gold-crowned dusk.

Sunday again, and Fletcher did better this time. Before, he had made it clear that, though a Nonconformist, he was a man of culture. Yet there had been a decent modicum of sense and manliness behind the pretentiousness, his hearers felt he knew something of weakness and failure. 'That's something,' said Hart, 'at a time when nearly every padre is an ultra-damned fool. I came here from France, and I could tell you things. Yet look at what's been happening. If there really *is* a God who is what you padres say he is, desperately keen on pushing his particular favourite creed, whatever it costs, he's given you the chance of a thousand years. He's obviously a fool, for conformity isn't worth the price of all this iniquity and wretchedness. But anyway, he gave you the chance to pull us all into conformity —until we began to think again. But you've failed —failed before the chance is half-finished. You've got your compulsory parades; and there's always some powerful bigot who'll see to it that the C. of E. parades are packed, whoever else goes short. But

is it worth it? A compulsory collection of the whole manhood of a nation, just to give them the prize exhibition of all the rabbit-brains that we've been fostering all these years? What's going to happen afterwards, when they get away from the sergeant-major? Damn it, Kenrick'—it was the first time he had called him Kenrick, instead of 'padre'—'I've that anger and bitterness when I remember the incredible ass of a Bishop who looked us up my first year in France, disguised as a major-general, that I can't stop to think if the Mind behind all this stuff that we see is responsible for all the Christian folly or not. God forgive me! I've no more right to be unjust to him—if he exists—than I have to be unjust to you.'

Kenrick's face was troubled by his own thoughts. Seeing it, Hart went on more kindly.

'That boy's a decent boy, all the same. Fletcher, I mean. I'm going to talk to him when I get a chance.'

6

Two hours later, Hart reported results. 'I've had a *buk* with your fellow-padre. He's learning things. But he's learning the wrong things.'

'How wrong things?'

'The things that belong to his peace—the things that make him complacent. They're always the things we learn first.'

Hart explained that Fletcher had been impressed by the fact that officers, though they shunned religious services, were keen to talk about religion. Most of them, for the first—and last ?—time in their lives were thinking about it. 'He went for me about confirmation. He's been meeting the public school boy, a new type to him ; he says this type is confirmed before the chap has begun to think, and accepts his religion as part of the social system and then never attends to it again—except as a part of that sacred system. Asked me what was the sense of confirmation.'

'What did you say ?'

'Quite a lot. I'd found out he was a Baptist, and had no use for infant baptism. So I told him there was one overwhelming argument for both infant baptism and confirmation in childhood. He asked, what was that ? I told him, for practically everyone it was then or never. He was going to shout out that this proved his point, of the uselessness of both ceremonies, when he suddenly saw ahead, which I fancy he doesn't often do. He saw that on *his* conditions religion became a hole-and-corner business for about one per cent. of the adult populace outside our lunatic asylums. I liked him, I tell you. I believe he's got that decency in him that he'd chuck religion if you could convince him that the Deity meant it as a private bun for half-a-dozen pals of his own. I was sorry for him, so I took him back to a line that comforted him again. I said "Yes ? You

find us keen to discuss religion?" And his face dropped its distress, and lit up; and he gave me a flood of it. He says these fellows who now talk to him are where Nonconformists of the same social status'—'more or less,' thought Kenrick, who had abundant rags of public school and established church righteousness clinging to him—'were ten years ago. They're all asking him about the inspiration of the Bible, and Evolution. And—I say, padre,' he called, seeing Fletcher wandering their way, 'we want you. I'm putting your fellow-padre through the same queries. Isn't it a fact that our fellows are all worrying about the Bible and Darwin and——'

'Yes,' said Fletcher. 'And especially about the Virgin Birth. They seem to think that the Divinity—no, I'll use the term Deity,' said the scrupulous schoolman, 'of our Lord depends on it. I tell them I don't believe in the Virgin Birth, and they're horrified. They say, "Then you oughtn't to be a padre." I can't get them to see that as a Nonconformist I'm *not* morally bound to believe what their chaps are forced to believe. They seem to think that there's some law obliging all padres to believe what the Church of England teaches. And then they ask me, "Why are there all these divisions in Christianity? Why can't there be one church?"'

'Meaning thereby,' said Hart, sympathetically, 'Why the devil can't you all come back to the Anglican Church?'

'Precisely. As I told you, Major, they're where our chaps were in the days of the New Theology row. It's simply absurd, being expected to answer questions about Cain's wife and the seven days of Creation. And arguing with fellows who think that you can't be a Christian if you don't swallow a lot of sheer tosh. Isn't there *any*one in it who sees how narrow the Church of England world is?'

Yes, Kenrick was beginning to see. He was about to ask, what was the New Theology; but with a sudden flash of illumination he saw that it didn't matter in the least, except in Fletcher's world, where a lot of things seemed important, as the noisy bursting of paper bags seems important to a child. Yet he did not resent Fletcher's contempt, for he felt again on his spirit the breath of that chill wind of isolation. He had come to this land clothed, and was beginning to wonder if there was nakedness awaiting him.

To his own narrowness Fletcher was blind. He had been to a school where he had been taught a decent amount of classics; he was no fool, he was something of a scholar, he could speak well. Though his use of words ran to seed in floridity and the final fruit of the florid mind, a pseudo-mystic sentimentalism for whose expression preachers have built a mould of endless *cliches*, yet he used words well. Neither he nor his world had reached that last infirmity of noble mind, the mood on which soothing language and rhythm cloy when they serve but to

make the listener forget facts. This mood is commonly called cynicism by those who feel that it criticises them and aims at making them unhappy. Kenrick was no cynic, so he had not the heart to point out that Fletcher's world, in which the mind sought to engage itself in only the best things, was a world mean and sectarian. It brings a sense of greatness to have been conversant with great transactions. But Fletcher was apt to chatter of trivial things ; the War had made him like an owl chased out of its corner and trying to persuade itself it had never been there.

Once a member of Fletcher's school had attained, late in life, a subordinate position in a short-lived Cabinet, where none of his colleagues respected him ; another old boy was running a jocular column in a daily paper ; somewhere on the vast battle-front, it seemed, there was a third who ranked as a lieutenant-colonel. Of these three Fletcher bragged sometimes, with a certain uneasiness. Kenrick thought of how at his own old school it was taken for granted that a considerable proportion of them would become members of parliament, famous writers, generals or bishops. Well, whose fault was it ? Till a generation back, one church had monopolised the universities ; it still largely held the two that mattered. The rest of English Christendom had been driven into 'spiritual' things, into preaching and praying. Granted that the fortunate ones had stalked over the world as Goliath might have done, staring out from

a ten-foot high vacuity, at any rate they had had a world to stalk in; the others had had only a box within the world. At Fletcher's school ambition had pointed to the possibility of becoming an eloquent preacher, or a 'religious statesman,' perchance even President of the Free Church Council; or you might write a fine commentary on the Book of Ezekiel. One old boy had translated *Leviticus* into Javanese.

Kenrick felt he had to defend his friend. 'It isn't from sheer perversity that they read the *Free Church Intelligence*,' he said, after Fletcher had wandered off again. He was red to the roots of his hair, as one might be for a comrade caught drunk and naked; Hart, the scoffer at all religion, had taken up a journal from Fletcher's chair, and was idly glancing through a column of pious chitchat:

> 'It was a sweltering day when I joined the throng of worshippers who were making their way to the fine old Presbyterian tabernacle consecrated by memories of the Rev. Hugh McCallum's mighty ministry. The Rev. Gareth McFerguson was commencing his ministry here. Dark-eyed, with raven-black hair—he has a habit, when excited, of brushing these locks back with a fine, sweeping gesture of his hand—the young man who has been called so early to be so great a shepherd in our Israel has that first essential of a preacher in the front rank, a pulpit *personality*. More than one must have been reminded of Robert Louis Stevenson's striking phrase——'

Kenrick tore the paper from his grasp, saying passionately and desperately, 'For God's sake, Major —no, I'm not swearing, I'm speaking literally— don't, don't, don't! It tells you all about the slush he poured out as prayer, and the tosh he spouted as sermon, and the way he hypnotised them into forgetting everything that God really cares about; and what the imbecile who wrote that puff heard one worshipper say to another when going out afterwards. But what else have they been taught to read?'

'Anyway, what else *is* there for Christian people to read?' asked Hart.

Kenrick with surprise saw that he was not speaking contemptuously.

7

P25 toiled on through a region of shallow, spreading waters and sandbanks. Vast flocks of sandgrouse sat on the mud, or flew low over the thorn. The boat crashed into two *mahailas*, sinking both; she knocked the two banks about badly, and finally stove in her own left-side *mahaila*, which was absurdly overladen with barley. It sank; and the passengers thanked God that they were rid of a vagrom knave. Another day, P25 tried to pull another P boat off the sand, succeeded, but herself stuck for twenty-four hours. Boats passed her, going downstream; they were crammed with sick who looked wretched beyond words. Those that died were tossed overboard,

where camels, mules, and men were bobbing, bloated, in the water.

It would be tedious to enumerate the other wearinesses of the journey—how at Ali Gharbi the skipper went aboard another boat, to see a chart and ask about the state of the river higher up, a piece of foolishness which resulted in his being told there were two P boats aground, which he must pull free—how P25 tried to pull P6 off some mud, and of course stuck herself—how next day she pulled P87 off, snapping two hawsers in the attempt to do the same service for P71, which had been four days on a bank, packed to her ropes with sick and dying. Then she had to send a fatigue party back to Ali Gharbi for rations, her provisions being exhausted; they returned reinforced by a reluctant sheep. At last there was but one day's coal left. But she reached Sheikh Saad, where the P boat's reign passed into that of the T boat. Here Fletcher was met by his own principal chaplain, who shifted him to another division on the right bank before Kut; and he disappeared into the desert, taking a deal of kit, much of it very surprising kit. Hart and Kenrick transferred to a T boat, and went on through country torn with marks of recent fighting. On the 20th they reached Arab Village, crossed by a bridge of boats, and went their ways, Hart to his battalion, Kenrick to report to the divisional A.D.M.S.

CHAPTER THREE

1

A FEW years ago a well-known publicist made a brief appearance after death to a friend. 'How do you find it, Jones?' he was asked. He thought, and then in the manner of his life replied slowly, 'Well, I find it all extremely *interesting*.'

Kenrick found it all extremely interesting. McIntyre, the D.A.D.M.S., told him he was attached for duty to the 171st Sikhs, then out of the line and resting. He joined them, and said goodbye to his batman, the two having first evicted a large black snake from the site the adjutant selected and pitched Kenrick's forty-pounder.

The 171st were a mess renowned for their cheery outlook on life. The cheeriness of an Indian regimental mess is a dignified, self-contained affair, it does not slop over like that of the less reputable English regiments, whose aggressive bacchanalianism turns to propaganda and is a nuisance to neighbours who prefer to drink quietly. Even so, Kenrick shocked Wilson, their adjutant, when after various

refusals of hospitality in its most obvious and understandable form he suggested a compromise.

'I'll split a beer with you if you like.'

'Split a beer!' said Wilson. 'Split a beer, a *Kirin* beer! Do you realise what you're saying? When you've got to the half-dozenth bottle, you can talk about splitting if you wish. But at the first!'

The discovery that the new doc neither gambled nor drank—for splitting a Japanese beer is not drinking, as Wilson, whose passion was precision of speech, pointed out—gave a tragic minor tone to the 171st's vociferous welcome of him. But Hart, who took an early opportunity of calling, set things right by explaining that he was a padre. Kenrick refuted the charge; but a moment's cross-questioning, deftly guided by his treacherous friend, established his missionary past beyond denial.

'So what's the odds, padre?' asked Major Abell, the second-in-command. 'If you're a missionary, padre, obviously you're a padre, padre. Don't quibble, padre. We're plain men here, padre.'

The walls of the tent were hung with the mildly filthy imbecilities of a French artist then in vogue; a side-table was littered with copies of illustrated journals and piled high with *La Vie Parisienne*. The British Army was toiling in the wake of its Ally's wit and esprit; it was not amused by the artist or the boresome repetitions of *La Vie*, but it had at last come close enough to Continental opinion to have

learnt that the Englishman is considered stupid. Since these things appealed to that city which is the heart of the wittiest and cleverest people in Europe, we too would learn to appreciate them, we would show that we were ourselves gay and gallant dogs. Another side-table carrying drinks, a gramophone and records, completed the mess-tent furniture.

Kenrick, glancing away from the art and literature men were fighting to save, felt his spirits lighten at the sight of his new companions. Desert sojourn and hard, lean living had worked these bodies as with a file, leaving them clean and muscular, blue veins showing in the tan of their bare knees and lines about the eyes. They were a mixed crew; but in every man lived endurance, patience, courage and cheerfulness. These might be passive in Gibson, the colonel, who was lazy and easy-going; they were active in Abell, who was personified generosity, always unruffled and gay, always the first to offer a visitor hospitality or to drop in on a battalion newly arrived near by, to ask if a meal would be any use to them. These senior officers were regulars, as were three of the company commanders; the others were Indian Army Reserve of Officers, drawn from a wide practice of life. Captain Chapman was a planter, as were three of the subalterns; Hillyer was a Hugli pilot, Oddam and Anderson were Indian Civil Service, others were Forest Service, Educational Service, or had been in business in Calcutta or Bombay. The social gulf

spanned was considerable, from Anderson, whose father was a Lieutenant-Governor, to Jamieson, whose flushed skin and clipped speech and shyness as to his past made his general position clearer than he would have cared. But the gulf was spanned; for this was an Indian battalion on active service. When fighting comes, the mortality among the officers of an Indian battalion, for reasons that need not concern the reader, is in excess even of that among those of a British battalion. This sense of hovering Valkyrs knit them in a comradeship closer than was usual in the British messes; such an arrangement as obtained in a neighbouring British battalion, where the colonel, major, doctor, and company commanders messed together, and the subalterns separately, seemed to them incredible.

'Damn it all, it's only damned selfishness,' said Captain Mackenzie. 'They bag half the battalion's drink, in hard times, when the canteens ration us; and half of everything else, though there are only seven of them. *And* a bit over, for the colonel and major. They feed and booze like cabinet ministers, and let the subalterns mug along anyhow.'

'It doesn't give the subalterns a chance of learning any decency,' said the colonel, tactlessly.

2

Kenrick was introduced to the customs of the plain —for the English, even in a three months' stay, build

up their established traditions and customs. If the Fundamentalists' Hell is a self-complete civilization and secluded from all relations with the Christian Olympus, it will have its own standards and methods of recreation. Sannaiyat was such a civilization, its No Man's Land an isthmus, ' a narrow strip of land separating two armies entirely surrounded by Arabs.' The river, the enemy, the marsh, and the inhospitable spaces where hunger and murder had their home, were the four walls about this compact society.

We must touch upon its habits. For some reason which no student of thought has discovered, during this second year of the Mesopotamian War the superstition was strong that it was almost certainly fatal to touch a drop of alcohol between sunrise and sunset—with the converse belief that between sunset and sunrise alcohol lost every tinct of deleterious quality and became nourishment in its most concentrated form. Had a visitor from another clime descended during the half-hour before sunset, he would have thought himself at a solemn rite of sun-worshippers. Everywhere, tables and easy chairs stood before tents, while hushed, reverent faces were fixed on the golden orb, following the glorious creature's movements with a rapture of adoration. He sank; and music signified the ceremonial finish of worship, as, struck by the same happy thought, figures set gramophones to the strains of ' Another little drink wouldn't do us any

harm.' The universal popping of corks, mingled with the buzz of invitation and sighs of relief and expectancy, would have furnished material for an interesting page in the visitor's chapter on *Sun-Worship in Iraq.*

And at dusk stalked abroad the form of the gin-crawler. This sociable creature went from mess to mess, knitting the hearts of that battle-comradeship with his jovial discourse and discharging the functions of an unpaid news-carrier. For the 'beach-rumours' of Gallipoli, Iraq had pub-chat; and it was the gin-crawler who brought tidings of a Zeppelin now being assembled in Baghdad, to reinforce 'Fritz' in his morning vexing of the river-camps, and of the German Army Corps (with over a hundred big guns) that was gathering at Aleppo, to march down this front.

Kenrick was early introduced to a custom that authority presently suppressed as unhealthy, after it had lost a couple of promising new officers. Hart had invited him to lunch with his battalion, then in the reserve trenches. The War at this time was hardly even stirring in its slumber. Wretchedness had imposed an amnesty; to keep up the form of war it was customary for either side to toss one shell across during the day—Kenrick saw the Turks' daily allowance, lazily spinning through the heat's intense shimmer, and falling in unoccupied territory far to his left, as he went up. When you went to the trenches, you rode up to the headquarters of the

Brigade then in the line, and left your horse in a shelter deeply dug behind high masses of sand. After taking a trench-cup with the brigadier by whose permission you went further, you entered one of the half-dozen communication trenches, which led up to the lines, five trenches in all. But in August you did not bother to use the communication trenches; Hart ignored the sign 'Tigris Street,' and took Kenrick over the open till they reached the third line, where they condescended to drop into shelter. When they reached the dug-out where his battalion messed, Hart found an urgent message from Signals, and excused himself with many apologies.

'But I say, Jones,' he said to a young subaltern, 'you be a good fellow, and show the padre round, won't you? Fetch him back in half an hour.'

Jones took Kenrick round the lines and bays. From a sap-head in the front line, he saw the Turkish wire, eighty yards away, and the tangled brief stretch of wilderness between. This was the centre of the position; to the east, where the enormous marshes of the Suwakieh Lake stretched to the Persian foothills, both lines gave way, refusing their front, to a distance of eight hundred yards, and neither side had proper trenches dug. Trenches here with the coming of the rains would mean ditches, and swamp swiftly racing in. At the river-end, the west, the trenches finished abruptly in high bank overlooking wide sands where nothing could be dug.

'Jolly hard luck,' said Jones. 'Last May we had a lot of wild geese overhead, so the whole brigade turned its Lewis-guns and machine-guns on them, and brought down a couple. They fell in No Man's Land. The Loamshires tried to fetch them in, but lost three chaps doing it. Abdul put a machine-gun on them. Whatever they say, padre,' he added earnestly, 'the Turk isn't the sportsman you are always being told he is. I've seen him do some *damned* dirty tricks. But the Loamshires got the geese after all,' he chuckled. 'Got 'em by doing a night raid, under cover of a lot of machine-gun fire loosed off at another part of the line. And when they got 'em they found rats had picked their bones clean! Good joke on them, what?'

'What on earth was their colonel doing,' asked Kenrick, 'to let them play the fool like that for a couple of geese?'

Jones looked at him with pain and surprise; then he remembered that he was a padre. 'Why,' he explained, 'their colonel's an absolute fizzer. One of the very best, a real sportsman. He wasn't going to stop fellows from getting in a couple of birds that were rotting before their very noses.'

They thus beguiled the way, seeking and giving enlightenment. When they reached the river-end of the defences, Kenrick's guide said, 'Now take a good look at the Turco lines. You haven't seen all this criss-cross trestle work with barbed wire before?

No, *not* through a periscope! That's what those newspaper chaps from India wanted to do, a couple of months ago. Take a proper look round the side, with the naked eye. Here, this way!' And Lieutenant Jones pushed half his own long lean body out, into the trenchless space of sand begun. He took a leisured, earnest gaze, then made way for his companion. Kenrick popped his head out, and saw the wooden stands and wire, startlingly close to him they seemed. He withdrew hurriedly.

His guide loudly proclaimed his dissatisfaction. 'You haven't had a proper *dekko*, padre,' he protested. 'It's the divisional rule, that every new officer does a proper inspection of the Turcurian lines. Otherwise, how is he to know where they are and what they are like? Your life might some day depend on your knowing that. Now shove yourself out, and take them in. It's quite safe. Abdul hasn't potted at us—not *deliberately*, I mean; there's often a bit of loose stuff flying about at random, especially in the back area—for a couple of months.'

Kenrick accordingly exposed himself to the waist, saw, and was allowed to return to cover. He was one of the last officers to keep this divisional rule. A fortnight later, Abdul, with characteristic lack of the sporting spirit which has made the Briton what he is,[1] set a sniper to watch this hole. The sniper was believed to be the famous 'Pink Face,' a Turk whose

[1] The envy and astonishment of the whole world.

rubicund and joyous visage had been often glimpsed but never hit; and the Loamshires had a brace of funerals, of subalterns newly joined from England. Thereafter a divisional order instructed officers and men to refrain from exposing themselves unnecessarily; it was reinforced by a still more stringent one, some days later, several batmen having walked across the sand to wash their officers' socks in the Tigris. No one could possibly have foreseen that Abdul would have turned a machine-gun on the sand. Nevertheless, he had done.

3

The colonel of the 95th was down with sandfly fever, and Hart took over the command. It was noon; and as he looked along the trench, a ditch of imprisoned, boiling air—you could see it winking and bubbling, and the walls were gaping and cracking—for one minute he saw it all as unreality. He could have thrust a hand through this grey earth, and through that sepoy standing there! It was a fantasy that men were confining each other to such an existence, and then seeking to bomb and shell each other out of it.

Then he made his way to the mess dug-out.

The battalion were—so near as to make no difference worth mentioning—where Hart had been shot down in the despairing rush of last April 6th; 'a demonstration,' it had been called, not a battle. Two thousand men had been killed and wounded—to demonstrate—what? 'War is a serious business,'

says Anatole France; 'what a pity it has to be conducted by generals!' The fighting of the 5th had been brilliantly successful—did not Reuters say so? The 13th Division had been held at Felahiyeh —they had more or less got their objectives, anyway, they had brought our advance so far as the steel jaws of the trap. Now the 7th Division were to go through the trap itself—if flesh and blood could. They marched through the night—a long, cold, wearing trudge—they went through the other division and found themselves in a flat country littered with debris and intersected with swamp. Dawn the betrayer threw their bodies into clear outline when they were half a mile from their foe. Hart was hit seven times, the last advance was so slow and exposed. They were absurd, torturing wounds—you were so much human black partridge, and the sportsman first winged you at a thousand yards, and you went on to let him try if at eight hundred he could score an inner, and a bull at five hundred. Hart dropped at the third and fourth wounds, which came simultaneously from shrapnel; the others he collected as he lay helpless, from dropping bullets and a wide-straying fragment of a shell that burst many yards to his left. Through a nightmare of a day and a night he lay in the open, the ground a marsh where waters raced in or receded as the freezing wind veered. Darkness had been even more terrible than day; the Arabs had come in and clubbed our wounded. A

ditch swept by spasms of machine-gun fire had kept him safe; but this he did not know until dawn revealed it. Next morning there had been advance again, and renewed slaughter; and under cover of this new misery he had been brought in.

But that day was not done with. Other experiences flickered across memory's wall, but this was painted there. Not even those chill glowing dawns, ruddy as if the wind had blown them into a cold flame, were clearer than the image their light had fixed within. Even incidents remained. He recalled two wounded Irishmen, whose words came to him in a lull between shells. One—calm, resigned, and miserable—rebuked the other, who had been cursing. 'Be quiet now!' he said sternly. 'Don't you know, Jack, that if we die now we're all right? We go straight to purgatory, we're safe from hell.' That was the 'baptism of blood' belief, the queerly revived pagan comfort so encouraged by the more popular type of padre; headquarters approved of it, and the cleric who taught it was held to be pulling his weight and to be worthy of recognition. And all sentiment went with it. How *could* you tell a poor devil who had endured the hell of this world at war that eternal hell was waiting for him when high explosive had finished with his body? If God were not inexorable mind, but were the good fellow that He has made most of us, He would accept the atonement of the tortured limbs and the spirit that had died a thousand deaths

yet persisted past them all, He would let the reckoning of good and evil go.

That Irishman had calmed his fellow, who had replied, setting his creed in words. 'Ye're right, Dennis. I've been a drunken, drabbing rascal; but if I've got to die now, I'll say, "Oh, God! give me a chance!"' Hart, remembering the scene with pity, remembered also how Fletcher, the stickler for truth as against sentiment—that is, sentiment that *his* reason disapproved—had already got into trouble for controverting a belief so generally held. 'Do you mean to say,' two ranker officers on P25 had asked angrily, 'that you don't believe that a chap who's killed in action goes straight to Heaven, whatever his life has been like?' Fletcher had tried to explain that he did not think of Heaven and Hell as *places*; they were *states of mind.* He had been judged to be quibbling; and in desperation had been driven to a disastrously effective retort, the question what was the use of army chaplains, if all that was necessary to ensure salvation was death in action. His opponents had met the challenge, with the rudeness of indignation. 'Use? Damn all!' Fletcher had been hurt; he had a lot to learn as to the lengths to which brutal rudeness can go when its victim is a Nonconformist padre.

After Hart had been brought in, he had been jolted in a mule-cart to a tug-boat—the stabbing agony of that journey had been endurable, from the thought

that he had finished with this wretched land. The bullet that struck him had saved him, he felt; his spirit would have broken if called on to face that hopeless task again. It had been the loneliness and madness of it all—a thousand yards from the foe, and men dropping and being blown to pieces. He had gone so near to losing all grip upon himself, all restraint in face of sheer, ungovernable terror, that he would never be sure of himself again. In the moment of falling something had stood firm; but in the miserable afterward his spirit had been stripped. He had lain helpless, while the shells ploughed deep furrows in the marsh around him. He had listened while nose-caps slowly and searchingly felt their way towards him. He had seen other wounded, as helpless as himself, killed by random bullets—the whole place sang with them as they swung past, striking up from the wet earth—smashed by high explosive. Shrapnel had exploded out of the sky above; three fellows near him had huddled forward, hands behind their heads, and had not risen after the shell burst. He knew now what the trapped rabbit feels when the stoat finds it in the snare. To have death's red, gloating eyes upon you—this squatting devil of a land gripping you! No torment that man has ever invented for Hell has equalled this that man has himself perfected and put in practice.

He was back again, to take up the old life where it had fallen—as he thought, done with. Did that

watching cruelty that men called Mesopotamia *know* that he had all but failed here? Was he dragged back, that in him might be seen that most pitiable of all spectacles, a brave man's self-respect gone for ever? This was Hart, of whom his brigadier was wont to say, 'In all my experience I've known only three chaps who didn't feel funk under fire—Hart of the 171st, "Jolly" Roger, a fellow I knew in South Africa, and N——'—naming a famous fire-eating general commanding another brigade. 'And I'm not sure of N——'

That first night of his return, he talked over things —surface things, that is—with Lovett and Sinclair, the two who had survived the spring butchery. The mess listened. Some time or other these lines, that had seen three British defeats already, would have to be carried. Those 'shows' earlier in the year were already half-legendary. To every man that was in that fighting had come not merely memory, but a difference in thought and attitude that would remain with him for this incarnation. It is not true that there are men to whom wisdom can never come.

4

Three weeks later, Hart's brigade were out of the line, and Kenrick's had finished their spell in it. Hart had his friend to dinner. There was another guest, Major Baker, a gunner. This was 'Floury' Baker, who must not be confused with 'Beery' Baker,

Major A. L. E. Baker, also a gunner. This Baker, of the unbibulous initials F. L., was an eager little man whose profession was his passion; he had a reputation as a crank.

Floury talked shop. Since the present job was to kill under penalty of being killed oneself otherwise, he gave his thoughts and dreams to ways of vexing the enemy.

He was cursing the mirage. 'Last January, at Hanna, I could have sworn that I'd got the range of a Turco battery. I saw the wheels of a gun disappear, and I registered a direct hit. But next day it was firing away as merrily as ever.'

'I know,' said Hart. 'An F.O.O. we had with us at the Wadi saw—we all did—a squadron of Arab horse as clear as the crowd at a football match. He tried them at sixteen hundred yards, and got nowhere near them—lengthened the range a thousand, and was still short. But Johnny had *us* taped,' he added. 'No bothering about mirage for him. He knew the land, and the distance of every blotch and pimple on it.'

But the enthusiast still pondered that elusive gun. 'And yet, you know, I might have been right. I might have upset the thing without smashing it. At Festubert I had thirty-six men out of forty-seven knocked out—that was direct enough hits. But I was in action again next day, with the same guns.'

Mackay, the youngest subaltern, spoke. 'What

was Hanna like for the infantry, Major?' He had had a brother killed at Hanna.

'Like every other show,' said Floury. 'Frontal attack, with no attempt to manœuvre or outflank. You see, conscription was bound to come soon, there was no need to save men. So the infantry were chucked across a billiard-table at Johnny Turk sitting tight in his trenches, with a mirage putting him out of space, out of time, with nothing that a gunner could get a bead on to. It began at Sheikh Saad, with five thousand casualties for nothing. We were held on the left bank, but the Leicesters went through on the right. They were told to kill and to go for their man high. They did. They wanted to, after they'd gone through purgatory on the flat.'

Hart's adjutant, Sinclair, nodded. 'It was easy to tell afterwards where they'd been. There were rows of Arabs bayoneted through the face. Kneeling, most of them.'

'The right bank was *mostly* held by Buddoos,' said Floury. 'And the Turk had no boats, whereas we had a bridge of them. We could have kept three-quarters of his troops useless on the left bank, while we mopped up the rest. Instead, we asked for it in the neck on both banks. And then followed one show after another of the same sort, all conducted on the same "war of attrition" lines. They had dumped all those Indian generals on us—sorry, Hart! I forgot you were all Indian Army——'

'Carry on, Floury.'

'Their notion of war is long shots at niggers in the hills, who never come nearer than rifle range unless they know you're asleep. And they still—*still*, after Gallipoli, and after Ctesiphon! think the Turk's that sort!' He brooded, while the thunder gathered in his face. 'But it isn't the Zakka Khels—or the Mohmands—or the Raja of Bong'—he spoke with fierce and earnest scorn—'that we're fighting now. The Turk is a gentleman with a head on him, and he doesn't put up a free show.'

Hart, watching Mackay's eyes, was distressed. He started to speak. But what was there to say? The boy's brother had been used up at a time when they were tossing clean, decent lives by thousands into a useless pit of sacrifice. He had known Sandy Mackay, and guessed what he must have meant to those who loved him.

They rose from dinner, to divide up for bridge. Hugh Mackay spoke again. 'What was the idea behind all that April fighting—after Hanna and after Dujaileh? Didn't everyone know that Dujaileh was the last chance?'

'Idea?' Floury repeated the word. 'Idea? None whatever—unless it was to kill off as many Scotchmen as possible!' He had forgotten his questioner's nationality; and he was too sore to desire to be epigrammatic. 'As if the Jocks weren't first-class men,' he mused, 'who deserved to be used up in a

decent show, with decent brains directing it! Instead, they were chucked at a blank wall.'

Hart was silent as they cut for partners and dealt. He had put a hand on Mackay's shoulder and drawn him to his table with Kenrick and Baker. There had been an ineffable gentleness in the action, unconscious and unreasoned. That death at Hanna had broken up the deeps in the boy's spirit, and the floods were gathering again and menacing the bridge that duty and daily custom had begun to build. The touch of Hart's hand turned them back.

But who was to turn them back from the bridge by which Hart was trying to regain his lost reliant self? He was back before those invulnerable lines —what *had* been the use of tossing down those thousands of lives? It did not help to know that it had been done to satisfy the public who demanded to feel that everything was being done to save their hero. Was their hero worth saving? At such a price? The brave ass who kept sending out—so it was rumoured in the Relieving Force—facetious and taunting messages, asking if his rescuers were 'on the right river.' And he had told them, before ever the four months' muddling began, that he had only a week's food, so that they had been hurried into action uselessly and aimlessly, flung in as they arrived, in fragments and relays, to be shot down in detail. And why *hadn't* he helped them at Dujaileh? He had held a footing their side of the

river, as well as his own, and he had guns and ammunition. Men were beginning to say that he had let himself be invested by an Arab force, and one inferior to his own. This was the underground stream of distrust and suspicion, sapping at men's courage and will to fight. Revolutions begin so; but the English are disciplined, and they go on dying, though they know it is for fools and in a cause chosen and directed by fools. But who was going to be fair to the brave man who had dashed up this stream, winning battle after battle and surprising towns, till he had almost rushed Baghdad itself, as though it were a hen-run and he a tiger? Hart knew he was in no mood to be fair—he had lost too many friends. He knew his fellow-officers were in no mood to be fair. But it was hard to feel that their sufferings were unguessed, and their difficulties belittled, while one man remained the hero of the newspaper folk, the *bandarlog* who govern us. You must not criticise this man, just as you must not criticise Nelson, or Wellington, or Lord Roberts. These were officially perfect in their chivalry and valour, 'the Christian soldiers' of our praise.

As though he had read Hart's thoughts, Mackay spoke. 'But wasn't it important to save Kut?' he asked. It is easier to look at your hopes and happiness in the dust, if you know they have been cast there in a great cause.

'No,' said Floury. 'Townshend, perhaps. But

not that dirty symbol. And if Townshend had been as worth saving as we thought he was, he'd have helped us, instead of sitting tight and screaming, "Get me out of this."'

'What went wrong with him?'

But Floury had seen the anxiety in the boy's face. This was no casual curiosity; there was too much hunger in eyes and voice. 'The newspaper folk won't admit that anything went wrong,' he said evasively. He looked at Hart, who knew Mackay and his reasons, whatever they were, for pressing this matter home. He read in Hart's face the signal to reply; so he answered, but pausingly and carefully.

'He got bewildered, I guess. He had the fright of his life at Ctesiphon—it was a foretaste of the new Turk that had just come from pushing us out of Gallipoli and *knew* that if he sat tight on the level the machine-guns would do the rest. No one has ever known what a shock that Ctesiphon business was—but we can tell when we see how Townshend let himself be tied up in Kut and never made a kick to get free. He wasn't a general—but he had pluck and dash. He was a sort of hawk, if you like; and he was chasing pigeons—up to Ctesiphon. But at Ctesiphon he came up against the man that owned the pigeons, and he felt the man's net flutter round his face. You can see that at Kut he was scared and dazed.'

They had cut and dealt. But Mackay was still

looking across the table wistfully. 'I don't want to hold up the play, Major,' he said. 'But the shows seem to have left a lot of soreness, and it isn't pleasant to feel it. I mean,' he added, colouring, for he was expressing himself lamely and might seem to be criticising what his senior had said, 'You've got this division crabbing the 13th and the 13th crabbing back.' He waited, silent.

For the War had entered upon its phase of greatest strain. The flame of that earlier patriotism had sunk into a sullen glow; the early reputations had faded. The Somme was showing daily how resourceless were the men whose life and study was war. Even at sea our old skill was seen to falter—the shock of Jutland had gone deep. After America came in, we were able to rest in the knowledge that no amount of folly and sterile leadership could lose us the final victory, whatever it might be worth. But now, even in the agony of battle bitterness was found—if a new formation bent under sudden trial, it was what you might expect from these damned civilians—if an old formation was shot to pieces, it was what their training made inevitable, for them and for all who were so unfortunate as to come under their command.

Sinclair, the silent, removed his pipe, and answered from the next table. 'You can blame the damned newspapers, Mackay—the swine to whom everything that happens is copy, men's dying and their feelings and attitude in face of death. This war has been

run for them—they chucked us away in brigades out here, so that the newspapers might be able to announce a fresh battle to save the great Townshend. And the papers bragged about the 13th when they first came here—bragged to *us*, who had been in Hades and knew it. And the poison was in our minds, and it came out when the fellows they bragged about had their bad show. But *we* knew all about it, all the time. There'd have been no bad blood if it hadn't been for the papers.'

This was the longest speech Hart had ever heard Sinclair make. He recognised behind it not alone the just assessor, but the adjutant. The 'killing times' would be here again, and soon; it would not help if Indian division were set against British, even in thought and mess-talk, or new army against old. Sinclair continued with a question to their gunner guest.

'Do you remember those newspaper chaps from India, Major?'

'Shall I forget them? I had the job of showing them over Hanna—they didn't understand, and they weren't interested. It was all Sannaiyat, Sannaiyat, the famous Sannaiyat lines. I handed them over to the C.R.A. for that—but they turned up in my mess again afterwards. There was one pukka little swab in spectacles—Jones his name was—who said, "I can't see that there's anything particularly strong about this Sannaiyat position that we"—*we*, gentlemen!

We ! that's what he said, putting us on an honourable equality with himself—" that we are sitting still in front of. It's just trenches on the level." His mind was back in the bow-and-arrow period ; *his* notion of a strong position was something bulgy and beetling above you—just the thing,' said Floury broodingly, ' for a gunner to range on to. It's that Indian frontier obsession again—chucking stuff at savages.'

Sinclair reinforced his own statement. ' And besides the newspaper gup, Mackay, you get a few asses in a division itself, fellows who've never seen a shot fired, who carry on the newspaper brag.'

' Yes,' said Hart. ' They scribble up on P boat latrines, " We took Hanna—a position the Jocks couldn't take." And the Jocks read it, and start fingering their bayonets. My partner's passed. You pass, Mackay ? Two hearts, Floury.'

' Pass,' said Floury.

' All the same,' he said, half an hour later, ' if we could have swapped our generals for Townshend, I believe he'd have got us into Kut.'

His manner was argumentative, though he was not answering anything that anyone had said. Hart nodded, glad to accept a statement that put some of the lesser bitterness of his mind temporarily by.

5

Kenrick found his hands full. Scurvy had been checked by doling out a vile chemical substitute for

lime-juice, and by using the salt-plant, abundant on the plain, for cabbage; but malaria and dysentery remained. The Mesopotamian War had lasted only twenty months or so; therefore for another twelve months transport and money were to continue to be wasted on tinned butter, a rancid oil fit only for swift burial but given out thrice weekly, and were not to be available for green vegetables. But apathy slew more than disease. Men died freely, because they were wretched and without hope. The Indians most of all, mildly and uninterestedly, went sick.

Kenrick, a faddist where sanitation was concerned —he had lived in a congested Chinese city where cleanliness had been all-important to the point of making it hard to find time to think about godliness— reduced the death-rate in the battalion. He got no support from his colonel; but Abell encouraged him—Abell seemed the only one in whom remained energy over that required for bare fulfilment of the day's tasks. When it was discovered that during September the 171st had had the lowest death-rate in the division, Abell trumpeted the fact, and made the mess admit their doctor's share in the achievement. Kenrick was luckier than the Loamshires' doctor, with whom he had struck up a friendship. Atkinson had been fired by his example to similar zeal, with good success; but the Loamshires' manner was other than the 171st's. As in Japan all achievement is ascribed to the Emperor's merit, so in the Loamshires

it was ascribed to the merit of that great and famous regiment. They realised that it was only natural that their record should be in every way the envy of other regiments. Were they not the wonderful Loamshires, known as one of the stiffest and most mechanical units in the whole Army? That their colonel and major were slack and ease-loving, with eyes shut to everything that interfered with their comfort—that their company commanders were ignorant and conceited—their rankers drunken and rowdy—that the decent fellows among their subalterns had been driven into a patient coalition among themselves—all this was beside the point, which was, that there was no regiment like the Loamshires.

Atkinson discussed the ways of the regular army—it is to be feared, impiously—with Kenrick.

'I wanted to go into the Army myself. But I thought my governor couldn't afford it. I was wrong there—I now know he could have done. But anyway, it was a good thing, for it saved me from making a fool of myself. I left school just as the South African War broke out; so I and a pal joined as volunteers—our governors suggested we should first see what it was like, and then, if we still wished it, they'd see us through Sandhurst. It cured us both. We saw things from the point of view of the chap in the ranks, and we saw that the officers didn't care a damn about us. After a march in which everyone was beat to the wide, you'd have thought they'd have let us rest, after

doing the necessary chores—which were quite enough, I give you *my* word. But no! they set us on to adding frills. Discipline, you know. It's what my crowd do now. When we're not in the trenches, the men are building mud-houses for the colonel and major. The theory is, they'll be cool to live in next summer. Does *any*body suppose we'll be here next summer? It's a wanton vexing of the men.'

'I believe it's better in some of the Scotch regiments,' said Kenrick.

'That's the clan spirit. *We* still get along on the squire and parson brand. Luckily, the chaps who make up the rank and file of the county regiments—*so far*, that is; I'm told the New Army's changing all this—are *damned* stupid. Take my gang. You couldn't get such utter chawbacons anywhere. What's the result? They're the finest battalion in Mespot, *bar none*. Last spring, again and again, from sheer exuberant stupidity they let themselves be led like sheep to the slaughter, when men with a wisp of brain in their heads would have bolted. They're only just beginning, one or two here and there, to tumble to it that their lives were played with by imbeciles. They're still gloriously stupid; it'll take them ten years to wake up properly. If this War ends first, we're all right for another twenty years. If it doesn't, then it's going to be red revolution.'

'Everyone says they're a fine regiment,' Kenrick demurred, smiling.

'So they are,' said Captain Atkinson, smiling back. The finest flower of the old Army. They've got all the stock things pat, to save them from the danger of thinking. The colonel never recommends a ranker for a ribbon—he and the major argue that the low fellow has got his commission, which is a piece of luck that would never have come his way but for the War. And, *whatever* anyone does, he gets no thanks, if he isn't one of the select regular gang. The subalterns haven't a decoration among them. Yet think of what some of those kids went through last spring! But the colonel and the major say, *They only did their job*; and they look very fierce and fine as they say it. And if a chap does something extra, they catch him out by saying, *It wasn't his job* to do it. And *of course* things go well, when they *do* go well—since they're the famous Umteenth Foot. They are sure that any civvy who has had the honour of being associated with them and survives will lie awake the rest of his life, saying to the rafters above his cot, "I was once an officer in the Loamshires!"'

6

The army were not deceived by the glowing reports of the Somme battle; they had learnt that it was easier to lie about battles than to win them. Early in October a major arrived from Flanders, touring this Front to lecture on the Somme fighting. As propaganda he was ineffective; his manner was

depressed, he was without rhetoric or the will to exaggerate, he answered questions lamely but honestly. The impression left was that the show was going badly in France.

Kenrick heard the lecture after dining with Floury Baker. A fellow-guest of the battery was Marshall, a young brigade-major, a noisy blustering boy without manners—his divisional nickname was 'the Stud-Groom.' The Somme butchery led to discussion of other slaughters, and the question of what the winter would bring in Mesopotamia. 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs,' they were told, with the gravity of the half-drunk. The flash in Kenrick's eyes caught an answering flash in Floury's. The Stud-Groom went on to rejoice over an item published in the day's *Orders*; a Private had been executed in France for cowardice. 'That's the stuff to give 'em. That'll put the fear of God into this bloody New Army, and teach a few of them discipline.'

Floury Baker flared into speech. 'You'll oblige me by cutting that stuff out here, Marshall. We've New Army in this battery, and in this mess. They've proved themselves as good as the Old.'

Marshall said solemnly, 'What about Mons?'

'You've got your ribbon for it. The newspapers saw to that. But Mons was a picnic to the show that's on in Europe now; and everyone outside a newspaper office knows it. If you're going to stop in the division'—Marshall was newly come from the

base—'I wouldn't talk too much about breaking eggs to make omelettes. There are too many of us who know how the staff make their omelettes and where they get the eggs from.'

Kenrick's brother had come in his thought; and he had hated Marshall, swaggering there with flushed face. They smash flesh and blood, and talk of breaking eggs for omelettes. Is it a brute's mind that visualises things so? Or no mind at all, but a blank face that stares out and sees words—a phrase, a stale proverb picked up as a scavenger picks up a cigarette-end?

Marshall was resilient, and recovered. When the lecturer at the end invited questions, Kenrick with contemptuous amusement saw that the Stud-Groom was the first to rise. In his confused thought Floury's snub was rankling. He would get his own back, and settle that gunner fellow. 'How have the New Army done in the Somme fighting?'

Kenrick was amused, too, at the surprise on the portentously grave face as the lecturer replied, 'Quite well, on the whole. In fact, really well. Yes, well.'

These New Army people then, incredible as it seemed, were not altogether inadequate, even beside the heroic stature of those who had had the advantage of being officered solely by folk who had been through Sandhurst and the Shop. Even their officers—'*so-called* officers and gentlemen'—were fighting well, dying well. Yet among them, it might be, were

even fellows who liked books, as well as men taken from mechanical and hard work. It was staggering —the Stud-Groom's head wagged solemnly as he huddled back on his seat—one needed to go apart, and think it out.

Is this the promised end ? . . .
Or image of that woe ?

7

At the times when both their brigades were out of the trenches Hart sometimes found a space before sunset when Kenrick could join him, and they explored the still receding marsh. The Suwakieh Lake is the variablest in the world. In the rains it races in and floods its old pools ; in the heats it hurries back so swiftly that innumerable fish, many of them of large size, are stranded in mud-pans that quickly dry. Here they are the prey of clouds of birds—the marsh was the home of waders and runners, of pelicans, oyster-catchers, avocets, flamingoes, coursers, bustards, sand-grouse, black partridge, buzzards, falcons, merlins, kestrels, harriers. Even eagles came from the Pushtikuh ; the first evening that Hart and Kenrick came, one rose sullenly from the bloody, half-picked breast of a sand-grouse, and settled a few yards away, waiting for them to go.

Walking was easier than riding, for barbed wire lay abundantly in the half-filled trenches. These were the scars and pits where men had watched their

double foe, the Turk in front and the water that threatened a flank attack. Beyond the trenches a long line of sandbags still marked the way the Leicestershires had come, an easy target for the sheltered Turk.

Once they caught a glimpse of a figure in the distance, lying full-length on the crest of 'the Pimple,' a Turkish O. Pip of the spring fighting. 'Floury,' said Hart, 'I know the turn of his head a mile off.'

'What's he doing? Watching birds?'

'Yes. Turkish birds. He's a queer bird himself, is Floury. His job is his job; and since we've got a war on he thinks it should be got on with as quickly and efficiently as possible. I've known him, when he wanted to locate a Turco battery, lie out in the evening for days together, just to catch the second when the sun's glint strikes on a gun-muzzle and gives a battery away. They tell me he spotted a gun-position that none of our aeroplanes could spot; and he knocked it out next day. That was in June, when no one else was taking the War seriously. Johnny must have thought it damnably unsporting of us. Floury's on the same game now; he told me he was worrying as to where a Turco battery was firing from. He's watching the country as if a drink depended on it.'

One evening they rode to the extreme south of the divisional position, to the old tumbled trenches of Hanna. Hart had received word of a friend's body

still unburied here; an acquaintance from another division had landed to shoot grouse and been shocked to find the mummied corpses of the spring battles. His directions to Hart resembled those of another *Treasure Island*:

> 'Go past guard-tent, on road-track to dead horse skeleton (on left, 10 yards from track). Then bear to 10 o'clock, taking track as 12. Colonel Soutar is in shallow nulla, sixty paces further.'

Both men were very quiet as they clambered about the crumbling trenches. It was Kenrick's first real sight of war outside the history-books, and it was horrible. Some of the dead had been tugged to pieces by hyenas and dogs, but most had lain unmolested while the summer sucked their juices away and left them dust with a brown skin holding it together. They passed a lance-naik of the 62nd Punjabis, then a havildar. Hart drew attention to the fact that the latter's bandolier was still full of cartridges. 'I can't say why the Buddoos haven't looted it. I guess Hanna's a bit too much even for them. If ghosts walk anywhere, they should walk here. They have no right to walk at Marathon.'

Hart was right. The Marathonomachoi went hence satisfied, they have no call to haunt the shepherd's fancy or to deepen the wind's clamour with the rush of hooves and clash of spears. But these dead were flung down vainly, and went hence

with no deed done. Hart remembered the bitter, piercing cold of that night of vigil—a thin film of ice wrinkled the marsh-surfaces. Then at dawn his brigade had watched pityingly while the 21st went over; they had heard afterwards from survivors of the useless slaughter.

It was October; last January these skulls and thigh-bones and grey discoloured mummies had been men who lit cigarettes and cleaned rifles and made light of their coming passion.

As they turned to go, they were startled by noisy argument. The officer who told Hart of his friend's whereabouts had sent two padres to see about arrangements for burial. They represented different national establishments; neither of them belonged to the Hyderabad division.

Hart recognised the cockney accents and coarse face of one, a famous bounder; he wore a D.S.O. ribbon. Padre Oakes' creed was simple. He believed in G.H.Q. and D.H.Q. and B.H.Q. His job was to conduct services on Sunday; and when operations quickened padres speeded up also and made a big show in *Orders*. He would then fill a whole sheet with 'services,' and gallop over a wide area, for a ten minutes' gabble here and a fifteen minutes' gabble there. Authority, seeing the crowded page, was impressed. 'By Jove, but Padre Oakes is putting in full time. He's got ten, twelve—no, thirteen services on the map!' Before the War

ended, he added a C.B.E. to his D.S.O., and had five 'mentions' to his credit. But his job was not 'services' only; the common soldier was entitled to 'comforts' as well, so Oakes annexed the vast stores of these that came to the division generally, and distributed them as largesse from himself. This was part of the 'work' that he paraded so skilfully before the eyes of those up aloft. He believed also in keeping denominational boundaries intact; a favourite expression of his was that he 'liked to bury my own dead.' There was trouble if a chaplain of any other church by accident 'trod on his heels,' *i.e.* buried a corpse that in life had conformed. Except for this belligerent denominationalism, Padre Oakes had no merits that anyone but the Staff had ever discovered.

He and his colleague were quarrelling about the allotting of the nine months' dead. 'These must be yours,' he said heatedly. 'The Jocks were over here. My fellows didn't come so far.'

Hart plucked at Kenrick's sleeve. 'Come away, old man. I'll fetch some of my Indians to-morrow and see that Soutar has a decent burial. He was too good for these hyenas to be allowed to squabble over him.'

'I'm going to wipe the floor with them,' said Kenrick, white with shame. 'What do they think Christianity is?'

'They think it's a branch of the Civil Service. So it is, for them. But don't waste good shot on

jackals. That kind of thing is on top just now, because every sort of grabbing is on top. But it's being killed by the very stuff it battens on. Decent Christianity'll get a chance at last, when all decent people have given up going to church.'

It made a difference to Hart, these wanderings with Kenrick. The landscape of battle is a changed country under peace conditions. But the sandbags that marked the trail of the Leicestershires as they went to death marked also the place of his own suffering, which had been fifty yards to their right. His mind recalled the old sick terror. He would recall it again, lest the trial, when it recurred, found him failing. This was the house where he had seen a ghost ; let him at least grow familiar with its walls, for that ghost might walk again.

And the marsh itself was a medicine, with its vast lonely spaces and miraculous hosts of birds.

CHAPTER FOUR

1

THE air cooled, the haze lifted. One evening in late October the Pushtikuh strode forward—they were visibly nearer by some leagues, and their long scars and ghylls, on whose shadows the last sunlight rested, stood out clearly. They were the giant guard of this watching land. All through the heats they had winked and waited; now their sudden stride forward had the effect of a closing-in of the arena.

Overhead went enormous flocks of geese, seeking a winter milder than the Caspian reed-beds provided. Geese, and a hundred kinds of other fowl. Hoopoes and redstarts and Persian robins came to the plain, the dry scrub filled with larks. The world could live again; and the human part of it could die again. Rumours came up the line, of crowded transports outside the bar, waiting to be transhipped to river-steamers. Mesopotamia was dotted with camps, a continuous ribbon stretching from Qurna. The river was not going to be trusted again, its god was in league with our foes; the new armies would march from

stage to stage, till they reached the battlefields. Everywhere a hum of expectation began. Most significant of all, the Higher Command issued instructions that the troops should revel. Hockey and football competitions were organised, boxing contests began, ' gaffs ' toured the divisions.

' We're being fattened up for slaughter,' Floury Baker told Hart. ' God send that this fellow Maude develops some sort of cerebration different from the water-on-the-brain slushing to and fro which was all our beauties could rise to last spring. Otherwise——' He proceeded to point out that it was not the Mohmands or the Zakka Khels or the Raja of Bong who would be in charge of the bowling we should have to face.

It was queer, certainly ; it grew queerer before the play finished. Presently night by night the earth shook for a radius of many miles before Kut, the far horizons flashed. Steadily all night long the guns roared at each other, the black ' coal-boxes ' heaved up to heaven, the snaky lightnings leapt from muzzles. The infantry lay and waited for those invisible aerial express trains to come to earth with explosion and a scattering of soil, or prowled for each others' lives in the darkness. But behind the British lines fantastically garbed men disported as pierrots and sang songs fatuous and smutty. The Loamshires were fired to emulation, they developed a great gaffing gift and ran shows of their own for the benefit

of the rest of the Hyderabad division. They possessed a famous humorist, whose mind could find a rabelaisian aspect to anything. He was enormously popular with his comrades. 'That Grimes, he *is* a comic!' The gods, who see all human affairs as one theatre, must have been pleased to view simultaneously men expecting death and with arrows of searching probing their spirits, and other men, a few miles away, rocking to the antics of an oaf with the fixed idea that one thing was funny, one thing only, and that it was outrageously funny.

Fletcher had settled down to an obscure usefulness with the Bangalore Division, who were holding a stretch of infernal country away from the river, depending on canals and the Hai for its water. A light railway had been added to the desolation of the landscape, reminding the beholder that, though the Creator has done a unique thing in the Sahara, man has achieved something equally good in another line, in the slag-heaps and railway tracks of his coalfields. Here the two were flung cheek by jowl, to produce a third effect more devastating yet. Some obscure sense of partnership may have worked in the mind of the engineer when he named the stations—named them, for sufficient reasons, Sodom, Gomorrah, Tophet. It was after visiting this district that a pious Seaforth wrote home, 'We have lately seen Sodom and Gomorrah, places recently destroyed by our Lord.'

When Fletcher arrived in this delectable parish, he found two padres there before him. We have already met one, the Rev. Francis Oakes, D.S.O. A week after Fletcher's arrival, when he was down with sandfly fever, Padre Oakes darkened his tent-door for a minute, observing, 'You the Nonconformist chaplain? All right. I've only one thing to say. We mustn't tread on one another's heels. If I meet one of your men, I'll say *Good Morning*, but nothing else. And if you meet one of my men, you can say *Good Morning*, but nothing else. *Good Morning!*' He had gone.

The other padre was a huge Alsatian who looked after Roman Catholic interests. He had scant knowledge of English, and of English customs none whatever; he had been caught somewhere down the line—was a missionary in Busra, perhaps—and pushed in until an army priest could be sent. He was an unhappy and troubled apparition. Though he was entitled to a horse, the skilled and pleased passive resistance of divisional headquarters kept him afoot. It amused the gods to see his great bulk larding the plain, as he tramped in winter khaki from unit to unit. He was paid far less than establishment rates; he did not find a mess easily, and when he did was unpopular, for he had an objection, held with vigour amounting almost to religious conviction, to parting with cash when mess bills fell due. He usually compromised, and paid his dues in

whisky, of which he seemed to have unlimited stores, no one knew how or whence. Unfortunately, it was not good whisky. And then one day he had disappeared, and Father O'Donnell, a tall Irishman, had taken his place.

O'Donnell came with a note of introduction to Fletcher, from Padre Martyn. Fletcher was warned to remember Martyn again. He had almost forgotten him; but as he read the note those first days of newness at Busra recurred, and the simple, unpatronising kindness of the elder man who knew the ropes. Martyn was neither wise nor subtle—on the contrary, he got into trouble for the straightforward way in which he said and wrote what he thought, exactly as he thought it. He was not a great disputant, and he was far, *far* from enthralling as a preacher. *Vidi docentem; credite, posteri.* But he was a *person*, and as a person stood four-square as a rock in a sea that shakes. He was a person, because, whatever the philosophers may say, there is nothing so integrating as character. Intellectual brilliance can make a man a flame; but it is character that gives the green wood on which the slower fire of God can feed. *Nec consumebatur.* If there is any valid argument for a life beyond this one, it is the coherence that is built by character.

I should have liked to make Martyn the hero of this story. But, unfortunately, he never went nearer the line than Busra. And we are dealing not with the

spreading, placid lakes, but with rills that ran and finished.

Fletcher had drifted, after various unhappy experiments, into a joint camp with a detached Signals man. They invited O'Donnell to join them, and divisional headquarters had the joy thereafter of seeing the Nonconformist and Catholic services sent in for *Orders* on the same slips of paper. Johnson, the Signals man, was of the type of Scot commonly called dour. He smoked a great deal, and talked very little.

2

O'Donnell arrived as October was ending. Like his predecessor, he was a dismounted chaplain, until Fletcher, who had set up good relations with the Veterinary unit close by, generously handed over his own horse. This had been acquired by persistent demands in face of snubs from headquarters. 'Does he *need* a horse?' he had heard the D.A.Q.M.G. ask the A.Q.M.G., in insolent tones meant for his ear. This horse he no longer required, having annexed a slightly better one that the Vets had stolen—so far had he travelled from the innocent simplicity with which he had come upstream.

O'Donnell's gratitude was such that he found no words to express it; his voice and eyes were very close to weeping. This white-souled Englishman had given away a horse; the Irishman knew the splendour of such a gift. But in less than two

days he withdrew his gratitude unreservedly; and Fletcher's act of simple kindness was the beginning of a coolness between the two friends. Yet Fletcher had meant well. He knew that it would take weeks of patience and importunity for O'Donnell to get what he must have, if he were to cover the vast distances within which his work lay; and a shockingly bad horse was better, he argued, than no horse at all. But an Irishman from Meath would hardly have admitted this, which to the Englishman from Clapham seemed so axiomatic a truth.

When Fletcher visited the Remount Lines to 'choose his charger,' he had picked the showiest of the only three steeds there. A showy and spirited appearance was the point in which Tom excelled, and it won O'Donnell's approval at the time of transference. But after the second day Father O'Donnell never willingly crossed his back. As he fiercely said to Tom—with lowering eyes watching that proud quadruped pawing at the five yards that separated him from his evening meal—'Ah, I could put up wid your airs and graces if ye really were a daicent beast. But ye're the vilest screw that ever went to a knacker's—you, behaving there as if ye could win the Derby!'

It was true. Tom could never be ridden on a march, but had to be led by a dismounted attendant. Otherwise, through every second of the weary two-miles an hour trek, he was whinnying and dancing

and pulling to lead the procession. But when it came to any sort of test, particularly to that of a solitary round, he was a spiritless, dull, irresponsive machine. He was that worst kind of horse, a screw that is also an utter fool.

The day after Tom passed into Father O'Donnell's possession, the Bangalore Division found their water shortage intolerable, and slewed round to a position resting on the Tigris. Johnson and the padres found a camp at its rim. But its edges were sharp, so horses had to be watered four hundred yards further up. Tom, being ridden bareback to water by Private Kerry, the Father's batman, felt the occasion one to indulge his belief in his quality. There were other horses in sight, trudging slowly through clouds of dust; he would show them how a thoroughbred could travel, even in this land. He bolted across the desert and into the stream until it reached well above his knees; stopping short, he jerked his rider, like a stone from a sling, far into the water. He then drank his fill, whinnied coquettishly as he flung up his heels at Kerry emerging half-drowned and toiling towards his bridle; and galloped back, cursed by grooms whose restive charges were overwhelmed with his dust. Kerry, bedraggled and sopping, tramped in later; and assisted the Father at a commination service.

'Ah, if ye aren't the limit! Ye've a trot like a grand piano; and your canter, afther all your swank

and tugging, what is ut, but a series of jerrrks, with a perrrceptible pause between wan jerrrk and the next? But mere incompetence isn't the fault ye'll be remembered by—ye heavy, dull, ungainly brute! Ye're a cow that hasn't the sense to know ut is a cow!'

But if the Father could not always reach his men, they found their way to him. Night by night his tent was crowded. He had the gift of drawing them by his nature—an eager, vital being—and training had made him the perfect sheepmaster where souls were concerned. The slower Fletcher, seeing the legs protruding from one small forty-pounder like endless radii of a circle, and hearing the gay laughter within, wondered why his own religion, despite its tradition of 'heartiness' and of handclasp at the door when preaching had ended, did not attract men to him, its priest.

'However many chaps did you squeeze into your tent to-night, Father?'

'Ah, sure, and there may have been a dozen. Or there may have been wan less. Or maybe wan or two more. I took no count.'

There was neither Nonconformist nor Catholic padre with the Hyderabad Division, across the water, so Fletcher and O'Donnell had their hands full. Their parish bestrode the Tigris, and ran up to the marsh-edges. Fletcher found a small nest of his people in the Loamshires; there were zealots

in their midst, who presently asked him to throw his aegis over a week-night meeting to be conducted by their own prophets. This meeting, which he sometimes attended, was usually addressed by Joyce, a Plymouth Brother. Fletcher learnt that only by a watchful 'economy' of his own inner thought, such as he had often condemned in Catholic priests, could he avoid giving the deepest scandal to his congregation, and, most of all, to their unofficial pastor. Joyce viewed every word of both Testaments as beyond question exact in every manner of truth. He went further; he seemed to hold that everyone mentioned in Holy Writ was, by virtue of his remembrance there, necessarily a greater, wiser man than any man since.

'And remember, brethren, this man Nicodemus—and the padre will be the first to agree with me—was far more learned, far better educated in every way than any one of us present to-night.'

But Joyce was better than his hard and bigoted creed. His life was kind and fearless and unselfish. Fletcher, whom necessity was turning to 'jesuitical' ways, found it best—and found it easy—to avoid any theological clash, while he used him and his influence for good. Fletcher had not Father O'Donnell's natural power of drawing men for himself, so he drew them through their interests. He discovered that Joyce 'in real life' was a gardener, and something of a botanist. They were drawn together by examination of the scanty flora, now increased by

some dozen inconspicuous flowers that the colder winds plucked out of the thorn.

Fletcher was learning things—and not merely 'the things that belonged to his peace.' His theological competence no longer bounced into sight on little cause; insensibly he had ceased to trouble so much whether a creed taught 'rot' or tried to square itself with what science believed. Humanism was encroaching on the ordered plot of his soul—presently there might be fewer sheds and neat parterres, but there might be richer shade and more luxuriant green. We are body, soul, and spirit; and man has built up an amazing, complex life for the few years that he sojourns in this tent beneath the unchanging blue. Other animals have been content to flee and pursue, to eat and mate and hide; this animal has made itself parliaments and cities, and has wrapt its instincts and passions in flowers that the mind has tinted. If in the universe there is Mind, then it cannot have been unforeseen that these things should happen. If religion is valid at all, it must be widely valid, for all sorts and experiences of men.

Fletcher found that in neither the Hyderabad nor the Bangalore Division was there a single officer who acknowledged himself as any kind of Nonconformist. Yet—he had means of knowing certainly—some had required the heavy incidence of the War and the paltry star of commissioned rank, to convert them to conformity. Pondering this fact, he began to see

how dwarf and shadowed a place in the vast national life his co-religionists filled. They mattered nowhere except in the shops and factories. This was brought home to him by a remark of Atkinson, after he had met that scientist several times in the Loamshires' mess. 'You're the first Baptist I've met my side of the counter.' And if their better class and better educated people did not dare—or did not care—to acknowledge the pit from which they had been dug, obviously that pit had meant little to them but discomfort and darkness. Perhaps the day of the Nonconformist protest was drawing to its close, the work of Baptist and Congregationalist and Methodist might be done. Done for what? For a merging into the Mother Church of England? Hardly. For, if the Nonconformist way was not merely narrow but fogged and obscure, the Anglican was broad and mean and shabby in the dreadful sunlight now beating upon it. If the Mind that has made all things does desire to enter into comradeship with our spirits as they fleet through living to death, it must seek to find mind in us—some thinking somewhere, even the arid and rigid thought of Fletcher, some sign of intellectual competence and honesty. It could not will that the life it sought to impart to men should be merely a branch of the state service.

Yet perhaps from simple, humble lives—of men in the ranks, facing death stripped of glamour, without the prestige and inward comfort that commissioned

rank brought—might come the new vision by which men might hereafter live. They might not be Captain Atkinson's side of the counter. But then, neither would the Carpenter have been, or his servant the Tentmaker. Padre Oakes no doubt believed that if the Founder of Christianity had served in the War he would have held the Principal Chaplain's office, with Brigadier-General Saul of Tarsus, betabbed and beribboned, as his chief overseer of the clerical work. Fletcher was sure now, that if he had to choose between the brand of religion officially established in the high places of the War and that of Joyce—who believed that Nicodemus knew all that was worth knowing about modern science, Greek literature, or anything else that was knowledge—he would take the latter. But it would be a woeful choice! God might have done better for us.

And then, one midnight, he was summoned to see Medcraft, a sharpshooter in the Loamshires, who was dying. But he did not die that night, or for a fortnight more. His tenacity in clinging to life, and his suffering, never left Fletcher's memory.

Corporal Medcraft's last days were vivid with intense pain; but they were still more wretched with mental pain. His life had been thrown away, and he knew it. He had been ordered to find a fresh sniping-place in the front line. Having made it, and hidden it with skill, he went off to his dinner. Meanwhile the Loamshires' ruling gods had some sport. The

colonel, lazily drifting round the trenches, was told by a company sergeant-major of the new sniper's post. He collected the major, adjutant, and a stray company commander, and they took it in turns to have pot-shots through the hole, at no mark in particular. It was fun to try your hand at sniping. But when Medcraft returned from dinner and went up to take his new place, his world went blank and a stinging pain rent his head. A bullet struck his forehead, splitting his skull across. His vantage place had been given away before he could make use of it.

'It wasn't right, sir. It's no good telling me it was right. It was fun to them, but it was my job and the duty they'd told me to do. They never gave me no chance.'

Away in England, Fletcher discovered, there was a wife and two children. Medcraft was a decent skilled working man; he was fighting because he had been told he ought to, and he was dying because those to whom a nation's lives were entrusted had neither the wit to husband those lives nor the imagination to see what quick feelings of happiness and misery were bound up with the humblest of them.

But Medcraft's mind shifted to another unfairness, by solving which Fletcher set it at rest as to the wrong done to him, so that he died easily. 'I've been studying, sir—studying on them words about John. The disciple whom Jesus loved! *Whom Jesus loved.* But was it fair, sir, of our Lord to pick

one out, and to love him more than the others? Is that right?'

Fletcher explained. The price is all that we can give, but some get more for their money. No, it wasn't that—that left the dying boy still perplexed, it did not extricate God's dealings from the manifold unfairness of all life. The price is all that we can give, but it is few who pay it. John paid it, paid it more fully than his fellows. So the love which was there for all to take came to him in fullest measure.

Medcraft nodded, and was silent. Then he burst out.

'I see, sir. And of course, if he *gave* more it was right he should have more. But oh, sir, what a privilege he had—to have knowed Jesus like that! The disciple *whom Jesus loved!*'

By the glow in his eyes Fletcher saw that he had moved to a peace where all personal wrong was less than a forgotten trouble of childhood. He died a few hours later; but the wrong that had been done him was dead before his body. Joyce, who met Fletcher when he came again, said, 'His last words were that I should give you a message, sir, that he found a word to work on. *Behold, I come quickly.* That was the word.'

Kenrick came face to face with Fletcher by accident—both were entering a bay in the trenches, just about where Marner's Post led into River Street. He

discovered that he was overworked—his tiny pockets of men were scattered over two divisions, and in isolated units besides—and he offered to take an occasional service. The offer was a strictly limited one, a gesture of friendliness rather than a promise of much actual help. It was gratefully accepted.

It took some courage to acknowledge an entente with Fletcher, for the latter's first impact on the Hyderabad Division had not made the happiest of impressions. It was in early October, when in the day officers slouched about coatless and badgeless, often in hideous long slacks that swept up the dust. Fletcher, so attired, was making his way to look up a handful of his men in a Scots regiment, when he came face to face with Mandalay McCleod. That famous surgeon recognised him, and greeted him with flattering affection; he urged him to come his way. There was an elaborate divisional show on, a full dress sports. Fletcher was cutting it, having other business. Mandalay McCleod was dressed with unwonted correctness, but made light of this evidence that he was making his way to the fair. 'Aw, Ah micht take a wheen glimpse at it. But Ah've other things to dae than waste my time watching these fooleries.' He assured Fletcher that he would find other officers at the sports, dressed in slacks and shirt like himself; this was War, and in Mesopotamia. When they reached the ground, Fletcher had served his purpose, by beguiling the tedium of a mile or so;

and the colonel, seeing an acquaintance who attracted him more, with the scantiest of ceremony disappeared, Fletcher, not thinking what he was doing, drifted into the display; and with horror suddenly found himself drawing more notice than any of the items on the programme. Here—in untidy, filthy, shapeless longs and shirt with collar unbuttoned—he was in the forefront of a show to which the officers of two divisions had come in parade kit. He overheard—possibly was meant to overhear—a question asked of a Bangalore Division officer whom he knew.

'Who's that scrubby little bounder over there?'

'Unfortunately,' came the drawled answer, 'he belongs to my division. He's the Fancy Religions merchant. I don't think anyone's ever told him about ordinary decent procedure.'

A third officer was in the group; as he turned, Fletcher saw it was Atkinson. Their eyes met, and Fletcher with a shamefaced brazenness made a gesture of acquaintance. Atkinson's undeliberate hesitation before acknowledging it made his face flush a still deeper crimson. As he skulked off, fierce raging anger against Mandalay McCleod swept over him. There is a straightforward and overpowering selfishness which shows most nakedly in trifles. McCleod, for the sake of a mile's casual companionship—for which he cared nothing, save as a stopgap—had flicked him, knowing what he did, into this shame. When he abruptly left him, he had pushed him into

it. 'Losh, ye needna mind not being dressed. This is Mesopotamia, not Aldershot. Ye'll find heaps like yerself—heaps. And if ye don't naebody'll care a damn. Aweel, Ah'm glad to have met you again, padre.'

But his anger came home to himself, for being so easy a fool and for knowing so little. He had let down what he represented. He had not sense enough even to guess the obvious. Utter fool that he was!

3

For ten days Kenrick had received no mail. Hart, hearing of his trouble, bore down with him on the post-office tent. They elbowed the mildly protesting Bengali clerk aside, and ransacked it, thereby collecting nearly a dozen letters that had been sorted as belonging to a Lieutenant Merrick who was away sick.

From these letters Kenrick learnt that John had gone to France. Everything was moving with the inexorability of fate. John had been born in the last year of his father's life, when the shadow of lingering illness was over the whole household; his childhood had been one of sickliness and accidents, and to Kenrick he was a baby still. When his elder brother sailed for China, four years ago, John was a slender, courageous boy, whose eyes, even in physical pain, of which he had known more than his share, were never free from laughter. Now he was a second-lieutenant in that Flanders muck.

There was a swift increase of cheeriness and activity, as November ran its course. Some sort of a push was going to be made at the Turk, and the Desert Gods, who had drawn in the lines of the struggle, removed the more unbearable of the land's miseries. Flies were fewer, the air was cooler. They saw fit, also, to destroy a tabu that sat heavy on these guests of theirs. I refer to the superstition that it was death to touch alcohol in these latitudes, so long as the sun was above the horizon. A world-famed physician, who was a strong teetotaler, had declared that no teetotaler ever got sunstroke; he came to Iraq, was careless, and the sun slew him within a week. By his mishap the great fear of his words was lifted; men perceived, in the swiftness and accuracy of reasoning, that alcohol was good and strengthening at *all* hours, not during those of darkness and twilight only. The evening sun-worship disappeared, as a festival separate in itself, and became merely a quickening of rites reverently observed throughout the day.

Kenrick grew in friendship with Floury Baker. He learnt the haunts of that philosopher, and sought him out in them.

'Look at those birds,' said Floury. 'They're flamingoes. Look! they've settled. Now I watch birds a lot. I like them,' he explained. 'Not that I'm crazy about them, as Hart is. But these huge gangs flying overhead all day long, when I'm out here

alone make me somehow think of life, and the way men keep going on, and on, and on!' He paused, ashamed of so unwarriorlike a mood. 'But they're more than that. They're useful to range by. We *know* where they are now, for they're in *our* side of the marsh. They're about a thousand yards away.' He stuck a wand in the soil; it was elaborately notched into inches and sections of inches. He shut his left eye, and placed his right close to the stick. 'See!' he said, 'those birds come to this mark. Very well, then. Fellows keep on grousing that there's nothing to range on to, in this damned country—no trees, no mounds, no anything. But there are always birds. Did ever you see such a country for birds, padre? There isn't another such, in the whole world. And even in a scrap the odds are that there's somewhere a flock of pelicans or a few flamingoes, somewhere where they'll help you to place dear old Johnny Turk. Of course, if there's a mirage I'm in the soup, birds or no birds. But there mayn't *be* a mirage. Those birds,' he continued lovingly, 'have done a double job for me this evening. They've splashed a paint-pot on my eyes—look at the bonny chaps' flaming breasts! It's as good as a chunk of sunset—splashed it just when they were drawn with watching this grey desert dust all day long. And they mean that some Turco trench or battery is going to catch it presently, just when they think they're as safe as ticks in a blanket.'

Kenrick's circle of friendly acquaintance enlarged. Perhaps the queerest member of it was Hughes, of the machine-gunners. Swearing is swearing; but Hughes had a repertory of foully blasphemous oaths that made him a legend. Yet Kenrick never heard him swear. Kenrick had taken a service for Fletcher, in Hughes' lines; and the two established an entente afterwards. Hughes, looking at Kenrick from ambushed, watchful eyes, made up his mind about this doctor who wasn't ashamed to do padre work when under no obligation to do it; he was particularly careful when Kenrick was by. But Kenrick was present once when an incredible person from G.H.Q. —G.H.Q. had moved up to within ten miles of the firing-line, a fact not the least disquieting of all the omens now fast darkening the legionary's mind— 'lectured' the officers below field rank—Heaven knew about what. It was alleged to be about operations, but he was remembered only as having stressed the necessity of behaving more smartly when presently they moved forward through these deserts. They should not despise deportment even now. During the summer they had been slack—*too* slack, in his opinion. But now appearances must brighten, for a large part of successful soldiership lies in dress and drill. He had barely bidden them 'Good Day, Gentlemen,' when Captain Hughes stepped disgustedly out, and spat.

'This to *me*,' he said, 'when my last job, before

joining in this bloody waste of time, was barman in a Mexican brothel!'

In his own mess Abell and little Jamieson were Kenrick's best friends. Abell was the centre from which general friendliness radiated to the widest circumference. He was generous in recognition of Kenrick's quiet, steady efficiency. Kenrick became aware, too, that a cloud had passed from the rank and file of the battalion; the Sikhs were sounder in mind and body, and obviously trusted their doctor.

Abell was with him once when he was watching a spasmodic 'hate' of some violence. 'Look at those chaps, padre,' he said. 'Could anything give you a greater sense of peace and security than to be safe here, watching all that soot soaring up? We can neither of us say now that we haven't felt the fascination of war. To be a couple of thousand yards beyond extreme range—and then to see those grand fellows dropping and blossoming skywards! And the night-flashes! Magnificent!'

'The *djinn* slowly embodying himself from the bottle,' said Kenrick, as another 'coal-box' burst in the front line area, and majestically built to itself a body and skirts of black vapour.

'We'll be in that stuff before long,' said Abell. Then, 'If anyone's made our chaps safe, it's you. They were a damnably sick lot when you took them over, padre. We had to watch the marsh-end, for fellows trying to sneak off to the Turk. They don't

do it now. You've cleaned the fever and sickness out of the beggars, and their blood's decently red again. But doesn't it simply amaze you, that we have them here scrapping for us? They're mercenaries, when all's said and done. It isn't *their* Empire they're fighting for; and not one of them had the remotest notion of the sheer bloody hell he was coming to. And the show's been going on for years. They know now that the saheb and the Sirkar aren't the almighty wise folk they used to think them—haven't they seen us chuck lives away as if you bought men twelve a penny? Last spring we were asking their blood—and we hadn't even blankets to give in return, or beds when they got cut up. Considering they *are* mercenaries, I think they're wonderful. If we'd a brain in our heads, we'd see how perfectly bewildering it is that a lot of Asiatics—chaps whose own country has been blasted out of their hands by *our* guns—should be fighting and dying for *us*!'

Little Jamieson was pathetically ingratiating and keen to please. His race hold out their hands to the stronger brother—or should we say, half-brother? But there was a time when their own lion-blood sufficed, as the names of gallant regiments testify—when a Skinner or a Warburton ranked, on the field and in council, as the equal of the pure-blooded white. This War had given them their chance; you found them holding commissioned rank, in the

Signals, in the Supply and Transport, in the combatant regiments, as well as in their old fastness, the Indian Medical Service. It is one of the most moving memories that the four and a half years of shambles have left, that so many who died most willingly for the Empire were those to whom the Empire had given least.

For the imaginative Englishman glamour is suffused over a world of memories. Thought rests on the lush green of slopes starred with purple orchises and scented with cowslips; it remembers the billowing life of summer and its drowsy, delicious winds, the silent wealth and melancholy of autumn, the dripping desolation of winter or the white vastness of snow. Through all this lives some faery memory, a star of loveliness such as might have burned in the dusk of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* or shone from Cumnor Hurst for the Scholar-Gipsy. Nay, but all our ways are haunted with human shape or heroic memory—and who shall say whether it is some word from Athens or the grace of a living form that makes what thought enshrines something shedding light and fragrance and courage in whatever darkness our steps can know thereafter? But for Jamieson all this was concentrated in one thought—that of England—the name, the word—a symbol for all the godlike glory that time has ever seen or shall see—the name of the country that he had never known. His mind moved on a richly emotional level that of

itself betrayed its part origin elsewhere than in the English clans. He was stirred by things that amused his English comrades—he saw nothing funny in either the words or the tune of *Rule Britannia* or of *Keep the Home Fires Burning*—to him they were sacred, as a flag is sacred. For him our *clichés* were poetry and truth. 'King and country,' 'British justice and freedom,' 'equality under the Union Jack,' 'the Empire on which the sun never sets'—to him these things were not eyewash, not verbiage, not a means of dodging thought or deceiving ignorance or capturing votes, they were what was holy and worth dying for. And his belief was so fervent and childlike that the mess, though they might smile when he continually talked of 'Home'—'Four hannas and a hekka would take 'im 'ome,' says the Tommy in the tale beloved of Indian English society—had a sneaking shame as well as pity in the smile. There is decency left in a man when he blushes at seeing sacrifice poured out by those who have received from the Empire little but the right to worship. It is easy to exploit or ill-use weaker races—but it is not easy to remember unmoved what scores of thousands of childish lives were poured out between 1914 and 1918. Our own sons and brothers died lavishly and gaily—but why should East African coolies have died, and Indians and half-castes and negroes?

4

The war was quickening; your fortnight in the trenches now cost your battalion a dozen casualties, there was a fair amount of shelling, and a minnie had been established in the enemy line. As yet this heavier incidence of 'hate' did not greatly vex the front line; but it was a nuisance further back, where Abdul put a deal of energy into the effort to catch ration parties and other transport plying over the last thousand yards before communication trenches began.

It was now that strenuous revelry was inculcated on all ranks. November passed to an accompaniment of pierrots and funny men. The desert became a nest of singing birds; at all hours someone was humming or singing, 'I try to be good, but the girls won't let me,' 'Grandpa invented the tiddleypom,' 'Mr. Conductor, won't you play the two-step for me?' This lyrical interlude lasted through the days of fighting that presently began. To the end of his days Kenrick's brain kept a queer blurred impression of the last terrible rush that carried the Sannaiyat lines —no historian would accept the impression, yet it was his mind's photograph from the thing that he saw. He saw a whole division suddenly grow bacchic, till they were all, hearty majors and drawling subs and stolid sergeants and privates, sarabanding with interlinked arms, and chanting,

Some folk said Susanna was mad—just fancy!
Every night she two-stepped to her bed.
She used to do the dance with her fiancé,
Till the day that she was wed.

The dance grew wilder, more furious, to a music of piping winds that made Old Tigris raise his head to his banks to see it, to the deep drumming of massed artillery—and then, the whole revel, still dancing and singing, was swept at the Turkish position and through it. But of course this could not be what happened. Kenrick told me, a month before I set these words down—in 1927—that he was sure he could not have been in Mesopotamia. 'The whole thing's such an absurd nightmare—either I was dotty—sheerly dotty, all the time I was drugging fellows and tying their wounds up—and saw what simply did not happen; or else, I was never there at all, and have gone mad since. And yet'—he tapped his useless left arm—'this chap makes me wonder where he went wrong, if I wasn't in Mesopotamia.'

The Mesopotamian Alphabets emerged. All through the grilling summer majors of batteries, couched in deep brushwood and lost in pockets of the enormous plain—lonely, simple soldier-men,

'That never laboured in their wits before'—

had been composing these Alphabets. Now the gaffing season encouraged them to show that they too could gleek upon occasion; they came up from

hibernation, and went round the messes of the division, with much proud blushing to read their remarkable poems. Most of the Alphabets were rocky enough in metre and far from dazzling in humour; but a composite version presently formed itself, from the scattered high spots of many scores of Alphabets, and a touring gaff disseminated it. By the light of hurricane lamps a couple of thousand men and officers, seated on the desert, would chant gravely:

'D is Dujaileh; and D's the big DAMN
That Charlie let out when he heard that door slam.
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.
I is for India, from whence, as they say,
Several more GENERALS are coming this way.
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.
N's Nasiriyeh, where General Gorringe
In his last fight won the bun—and the orange.
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.
S is the sharks that go up to Baghdad,
And the S. and T. sharks, that are equally bad.
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.

There was boxing, too. Many are the gods of the United English Nation; none is worshipped more zealously than La Boxe. Figure to yourself the scene: the flickering lamps, the lifted stage, the eager officer who is refereeing and leaping round, breaking in to disperse a clinch; the rapt, uptilted faces; the combatants, fierce and inexperienced, or crafty

and wary. First come the novices; and it is great fun to see some meagre boy, after sparring up terribly to some more skilled opponent, immediately receive an unexpected and dreadful clout, and thereafter, not having the sense to go down, cling to the ropes while he is battered into unconsciousness—his last remembered sound—

'The inhuman shout that hailed the wretch who won'—

a shout not so much of applause, as of happy joyous laughter. Truly, we still have shreds of the Norse grim fashion of pleasure about us. And of the Norman chivalry also; for the veteran who slowly fights round after round until his years make the scales dip in favour of youth and strength against his experience and pluck is sure of passionate sympathy.

One night the lights were suddenly doused, while the spectators scattered. A hostile plane was up, and making for the ring of brightness. 'Damn!' said Lieutenant Jones, whom we have seen as cicerone on Kenrick's first visit to the trenches. 'I had a couple of quid on Gunner Sainsbury, and he'd have won. What the Hell was Abdul doing, to interfere with a bit of decent sport like this?'

5

Perhaps the revelling was needed. Russia had been flung out of all effective presence in the War; but Fate, that gave us chance after chance, brought

Rumania in, with vast stores of oil and food. And then Mackensen, in face of superior forces, crossed the Danube at three different points; the Rumanians were flying like hares.

'On my soul!' said Floury Baker, reading the news in Hart's mess, 'aren't they magnificent? They deserve to win, if they'd only fought fair.'

They brooded over their own Western Front *communiqués*—those announcements that went on endlessly, that our infantry had raided the enemy lines and brought in prisoners, that they had taken half a trench somewhere else. Baker was the soldier, and his admiration for skill was unstinted. He added, 'They've crossed the Danube—the *Danube*, Hart!—against twice as many fresh troops on the other bank. Why, we would never dare to cross the Tigris against Johnny in half our strength opposite. Never tell me again that the Boche isn't a first-class fighting man. If we'd had their leadership, we'd have had Constantinople, we'd have had Baghdad. As it is . . . well, old man, the War looks as if it's being steadily lost. And nothing that we can do out here matters a damn.'

Hart was confirmed in his command; his colonel had gone down the line, and then to India. In the necessities of his new position he was finding another self. Men will do what they are bid, these tools of flesh and blood would be as rigid as iron when their testing came; but it was from their commanding

officer that they must get freedom and resilience. It was not easy for the proud, lonely man to be friendly and approachable, unless he was drawn as he had been by the candour and inexperience of Kenrick.

But pity made it easier; as he went the round of the trenches he realised that in a few weeks at most these grave, childlike Indians and the boys who commanded them would be feeding the machine-guns. He was vexed with himself for finding it disquieting even now; then he realised that the trouble was the desultory and capricious nature of this warfare. Shelling came in spasms, the minnies tossed their bombs over at long intervals. Waiting was worse than the testing—let full-throated battle open, and a host of fears would skip away. The business of peace is to train the subconscious self to confidence and calm; when peace is shattered, the work is to surrender all to that subconscious self and let it carry on, without the conscious self being given time or chance to think. So now Hart went about, genial, always at leisure, and kept under the irritability that pricked at his mind, prompting him every minute to leap into some expression of impatience or annoyance. When the time came he might save his men from that sudden wavering that may mean a hundred casualties; or hold them till the moment had passed. He was glad to have the command, there was the less time or need to trouble about himself.

Everything would be all right if he could make himself a machine.

'Lovett had been taken to Corps Headquarters, and Sinclair was now second in command. Sinclair's nerves were steady, he really was possessed of the fatalism which is supposed to be the soldier's mood. 'When your number's up you go,' he said; he seemed to think so, too. His very silence was a comfort; his eyes under their heavy lashes seemed to hold all his own personal troubles in a calm harbour of quiescence. And Hendry, who was adjutant, made the whole business of preparing to die and to deal out death a matter of routine, he was blessedly unimaginative and efficient. The War had at last revealed that Providence had a purpose in making mathematicians. They were intended to be adjutants.

One December evening, when they were out of the line, Hart found himself thinking of Sandy Mackay, whose life had been thrown away at Hanna. Somewhere in that welter of skulls and skin-dried bones were the skull and bones of Mackay. He had not known him well; but there had been a night when he dined with 'the Blackforths.' How vivid and vigorous Sandy had been, the superb giant! The mess was well out of what they took to be artillery range, but a brace of pipsqueaks had whizzed by, exploding a hundred yards beyond. It was a reasonably near thing, and unexpected. They stared at

each other, wondering what Abdul was up to now; but Sandy laughed, and sprang outside the tent, returning with a lamp that had been standing there. 'I believe it's this little chap,' he said. 'You can see him shining miles away. Abdul sees it, and thinks, naturally enough, that only the staff would be fool enough to leave him out for a mark.' The lamp was hidden in a tent-flap and there were no more shells.

Hugh had a smile that reminded of Andrew, and the same magnificent easy build and carriage. Hart, in the unsteady sickness of spirit that came to him, looked at him exchanging a jest with another subaltern, and suddenly saw him not as beauty of form and expressiveness of feature answering the kindling of the brain within, but as skull and bones tossed down on the desert stretch of some Hanna to come. In that moment Hart would have given his own body to save his—not from mere personal love for this boy, but because the divine pity had touched him, as it touched Buddha and Socrates and St. Paul. He felt that he, the older man, *knew*; he had been so exposed and shaken that now no pain that came to him was comparable with the pain he felt when innocence and youth were disillusioned and made unhappy.

He saw that he was going to regain happiness, which he thought he had lost for ever. It is happiness that we feel when we are young and free, with fire in our

limbs and mind. When that is gone there is no happiness again until we have passed outside all this show of things and know one thing alone, that we would rather suffer ourselves than let others suffer.

'Hugh,' he said, 'get your gun out to-morrow, at five sharp, and do a turn on the marshes with me. You're getting soft and puffy—your commanding officer orders you to take some exercise.' He smiled at the absurdity of the lie, in face of the witness of that young god's limbs and clear-cut features.

CHAPTER FIVE

1

THE winds were wildly piping, the river was dancing like a snake, the winter rains had broken. The Pushtikuh were snow-capped, with quite a miniature Himalayan effect, and the breeze that blew from them at dawn made you feel a man all over.

The marsh took a hand in the game; flooding in, it circumscribed the limits of the war. The cavalry, riding round the old Hanna position to see if there were any chance of slipping under the lee of the hills and taking Johnny in the rear, found it floods everywhere. A fool of a *drabi*, who had left his mules and stumbled off, seeking India that lay to the east, was dazed by the sudden apparition of many superb men on splendid horses, bits and accoutrements jingling. He was their sole booty, and was brought back and shot in a bracing Mesopotamian dawn, for the military crime of desertion. The same week a labour corps, appalled by the job of building bunds in this mud, struck work; two of them, jail-birds like their comrades, were hanged by the neck till they

were dead, for mutiny. In the trenches the infantry dug against the marsh sapping at their meagre walls, and watched the swelling river. Excitement gathered, with the certainty of war-clouds massing and about to burst; and squalor and tragedy, magnanimity and meanness, lived together in men's deeds, the more tensely as the fevered unreality of their days deepened.

December 13th. Sunset went through round after round of magnificent change, settling into a heavenly calm of vast unmoving rivers and glowing seas. It lingered, loth to let day finish. When at length it gave way to darkness, men lay awake and thought of what was to come at dawn. The 'Iron Division' had set out on their blood-stained path to Baghdad; all through the night slow columns were moving towards the Hai, which the cavalry and they were to cross at dawn. Ten hours; and the Turk would find that his foes had taken a swift leap forward. Our barrage at Sannaiyat would open.

It opened at dawn. The river became a corridor of death, the great shells of the monitors roaring through it to the Turkish trenches. On the Sannaiyat front, and from the enfilading right bank, the tempest fell. The enemy watched this front narrowly; he had seen our digging parties—but they may have been simply digging against the encroaching marsh—he had seen our guns registering on the marsh. Now were we going to rush at those lines again?

Then the bombardment slackened, after a dozen

hours of intensity. It had served its purpose, in masking our spring on the other bank. But, though it slackened, for two months now it was to be continuous. All the forward areas became unhealthy. The wild cats vanished from the tamarisk brushwood of the gun-positions; and Cuthbert the Cat reached Fletcher's encampment.

When he arrived was uncertain; but he arrived, and his favourite resting-place was Fletcher's forty-pounder. Fletcher, going to it by dusk, saw blazing jade-green eyes, and a snarling body swished past him. This happened again next day, in a light sufficient to identify the intruder. 'Losh, sirrr,' said John, his batman, 'did ye nae get a gluff o' it?' John's Doric was a joy. The Tigris, lapsing filthily past with its dead camels and horses and men, was always 'the burrrn.' 'Wull ye hae it oot o' the burrrn, sirrr?' was his enquiry when asked for water for a bath. 'Pit yer cuddies in, mon,' he screamed to a *drabi* whose unyoked mules had strayed on to territory that he considered his, 'or I'll pit yer heid in the burrrn. Losh,' he added to Fletcher, 'thae chaps are awfu' stupid. They dinna understand the plainest English.'

2

Kenrick was returning from a trip to the D.A.D.M.S. about medical stores, and found his own mess on the river-bank, watching the shells falling before Kut.

They were all in the saffron kit which Sikh officers wear into battle—until he came up to them, he did not see that this group of Sikhs were not Sikhs at all, but his own race. It was as close as this, then; they had been told they might be sent into action at any hour. A mail awaiting him said that John had been in the trenches, and was back in rest-camp. John did not know where they would go when they returned, but hardly to a worse place; they had been thigh-deep in freezing water. A picture of bleak misery formed itself in Kenrick's mind, despite the courageous and matter-of-fact tone of the letter. These snow-capped Persian hills reminded him vividly that winter was closing down on Ypres.

He had promised Fletcher a service to-morrow. He might as well help while he could; it would not be much longer now. Next day, to reach Fletcher's camp he had to cross a desolate heath where, evening by evening, the Scots pipers practised. A Seaforth, absorbed, with skirts flying and head swaying, was walking to and fro. The wild music keened in Kenrick's thought; it was elemental, despairing, the voice of the earth crying for her children who suffer and cannot be shielded. When he reached Fletcher's tent he was dispirited. It was not active distress, it was merely passive acceptance of coming unhappiness; a Northman would have told him he was fey.

He had tea with O'Donnell and Fletcher. His company cheered him slightly. Fletcher told of

Cuthbert the Cat and his misdeeds—from which they had all suffered; the Father had found head and haunches of a vole on his pillow. 'A sort of little offering, to tell me he was grateful to me for not setting a trap in his favourite resting-place. But I'd have him know we're not that short of fresh meat as he thinks.' Fletcher in lyric mood opened a book and began chanting the *Canticle of the Creatures*. After the praises of 'our Sister Water, who is very humble and serviceable and precious and clean,' he raised his voice. 'We bless Thee for Cuthbert the Cat——'

'Who is neither humble nor serviceable nor precious *nor* clean,' said O'Donnell with fervour, 'as I can testify from purrrsonal experience.'

The others went off to work elsewhere, and Kenrick sat outside. There was a new moon; she looked ineffably desolate and saddening, as if her way had been lost in these skies of time. He remembered hearing that there had been a new moon the evening we had set out on the ill-fated march to Dujaileh, nine months ago, and how some of the men had turned the money in their pockets, for luck. Nine months ago; and already it was all legend, as dim and far away as the battles which Chedorlaomer and Shalmaneser had waged on this plain. Townshend was gone, his army had vanished into the silence of captivity, the dead were at peace at Sheikh Saad and Hanna and Sannaiyat. In that dim blue night lit

by one tiny sickle this ancient land ceased to be watching ogre and evil spirit, she became fellow-sufferer. She had watched age after age while the generations went by. She had seen Julian and Townshend hurried to destruction, she had seen Babylon and British Empire anguish. She had known exiles of Israel, and exiles from heather and elm-guarded village and Glasgow slum. If there were any mind behind these manifestations in time—that yellow crescent, those sleeping snowy mountains, the wildfowl crying overhead—it must be wrung with pity for our lives that are so brief and so full of effort that leads nowhere and of suffering that makes us old and without hope.

It was only two days ago that his brigade had come back from their spell in the trenches. It had been a gruelling time, and he was tired. The service now drained him still further; at the close he lingered, sitting in a deck-chair, his hand before his eyes. He had seen Father O'Donnell returning, and would have a few words with him.

O'Donnell brought in a message from Signals. 'There's a chap waiting to know is there any answer, doc.,' he said.

Kenrick opened it mechanically, and read, 'Brother John killed instantaneously mother's message keep heart.' He rushed into the open air; O'Donnell, who had taken the message from his hands, was with him at once. 'How! how! don't give way, man!'

That night he tried to pray. But no words came. He buried his head in his hands, as he knelt in his forty-pounder; but the only words that formed in his brain were these, blowing through it like a wind that goes the same round bleakly and aimlessly: 'Rain nor snow will trouble the dead boy any more in Flanders.'

The bombardment went on unceasingly. The earth was shaking—no, pulsing, throbbing, steadily—the horizon for thirty miles was a momentarily opening dragon-mouth of flame. As Kenrick rested his head on the ground, even the solid earth was a sea—waves of disquiet and agony tossing these frail lives of men and women everywhere.

3

He had held his morning parade and seen to the sick—they were singularly few, in this cold, brisk weather and now that events were moving again—and was resting in his tent.

He tried to get comfort from the thought that all had been well to the end. The will had borne up and not been broken, reason had kept her throne. There was mercy in God, after all. If he had to choose, for himself, for his brother, between the breaking of the body and the breaking of the mind, let it be the former. With many men, he knew, the mind had broken.

Then thought returned upon the rotten unfairness

of it all. John had never had any chance of escape, he had been doomed for no reason except his years. That baby had had so little out of life. A childhood of weakness, in the first and hardest years of their mother's widowhood—and Kenrick, remembering a hundred things, could have worshipped, with breaking heart, the patience that had lived in the child. And now, when he had at last got past physical weakness and was building into a noble and lovely young manhood, he had had to die. Kenrick was ashamed of his own easier and sheltered life—he need not have come to the War at all, and had come now not as combatant but, because of the narrow margin of seven years that made him not mere youth and limbs but trained mind and fingers, as doctor and surgeon. In a gush of anguish he found himself talking folly to himself; there had been no justification for this child's death except that only so could he, Thomas Kenrick, and others like him, be saved from their selfishness. He was to be saved by blood; but not by Christ's, which was a story he had read, but by John's. It would have been easier to have died himself, than to carry this wretchedness. His mind came back to this, that the thing was finished. That life had done with time. Every day that he lived would take him further away from John.

Distress deepened as he thought of his sister, and of the brother serving on the high seas. Their mother—John had had his own ways of tenderness,

such as the rest of them were too old and shy to use. She had known that he could not come back. The weeks had been for her an experience that he now tried to recreate for himself. But his brain was too numb for anything but misery.

Hart and Abell came to his tent. They said little; but it sufficed. Then Hart explained, 'I'd have come as soon as Father O'Donnell phoned me up, but I wanted to fix things up first. We've seen everyone; and you've got ten days' leave down to Busra. We *know* that there's really nothing doing on this front till the New Year; and this side only bluff then—for a bit. Your locum tenens will be here for lunch. And P71 sails at 2.30 pip emma sharp, and is keeping a berth for you.'

'That's all so,' said Abell.

It was nonsense. Abell's brother had been killed, two months back; he had let it make no difference, he had not taken a second off or let it darken his cheerfulness. Kenrick's news was the news of any man in these days. 'I *can't* clear off,' he told them. 'It's happening to everyone. Other men can't get leave off for it—why should I?'

'For our sakes,' said Abell, smiling. 'You're not fit to do your job till you're rested. It isn't safe for us; you'll be giving strychnine for cascara, and dropping asleep when operating.'

'The thing has gone through,' said Hart. 'I waited in the D.A.D.M.S.'s office while it was put

through. Division has granted you ten days' leave. If you refuse it, you'll be sacked and sent back to Bombay in civvies. You *can't* make a divisional order inoperative, even if you *are* a padre. It simply isn't done.'

'Besides,' Abell reminded him, 'this is the land of the Medes and Persians.'

4

As P71 turned in the river-bend that hid Sannaiyat, Kenrick saw day disappearing in a vast hearth-fire in heaven. That was where the dead were gathering —those who had died in Flanders, those who were dying here. The river, brimmed with the winter rain, rippled gently and seemed to bask in colour.

Kenrick's mind was haunted by words he had once read. 'He that is near Me is near the fire.' When were they spoken? Like Medcraft, he was finding a word 'to work on.' They seemed to link up with that amazing chapter in St. John's Gospel, where the fishers, after toiling all night, find a man on the shore and a fire and food awaiting them. Surely it must have been then that He welcomed them—Peter with his fisher's cloak all girt about him but shivering because he was wet, John and James numb with pulling at the oar and hauling at the nets—and said, 'He that is near Me is near the fire.' That calm, infinite conflagration shedding its brightness over Tigris spoke of the central hearth-fire of pity and

mercy, to which the gallant dead were being welcomed home from every country where men were dying—dying in misery and cold and courage and patience. It was this life that Kenrick was living—where men lurked for each other's lives and made unendurable the brief space which is ours between birth and death—that was unreal. The rest was eternal, it was beyond the touch of our suffering and our angers. Rain nor snow would now trouble the dead boy in Flanders.

Drifting downstream, he was like a man who had died. At the front all was bustle and stir; on the boat were only himself, the batman they had lent him, the taciturn skipper, and a Lascar crew. He had entered the other world, but it was silent, its inhabitants had not yet come to greet him. He was still too close to life's borders.

They passed through a land that was desert, except for the camps concentrating at Sheikh Saad and Amara. At the latter place they moored for a few hours in the evening, and he went ashore. In a huge Y.M.C.A. marquee, crammed with men, he heard the most famous chaplain of the Front lecture. The grand old unsubduable Scot, with his white hairs, his wound-stripe and military cross, was exultant, and his hearers with him. It was the prospect of coming battle in the air that so stirred them. Kenrick remembered a belief that Padre McAndrew's presence heralded the swinging of the tide of conflict your way.

Obviously, the Front was safe for a few days more, or McAndrew would not be here—he was here because in this vast migration of men this was the spot where most alighted for a day or two before going further. Let this place once be deserted, and the rifles, as well as the guns, open on Kut; and you must look for McAndrew elsewhere. Age and distinguished service gave him privileges which he used to the full. He obeyed no orders unless they were his own—where there were men to be lectured or preached to, he lectured and preached—where there was a Scots regiment in battle he was with them—when they were wiped out he moved on to the next Scots battalion that was 'for it.'

Kenrick listened; the warmth of the crowded room, the lights, the anticipation and cheerfulness of those hundreds of fit men, flowed round him, and he watched without sharing. It was dark when he returned to the boat's loneliness. Instantly all that he had seen—the packed tent, the bright lamps, the hale and eloquent old man—was lost in a gulf of antiquity with the camp fires and shouts of Julian's armies, centuries ago, or the gaffs which Townshend's men staged yesterday. Kenrick, lying on deck with his dim lantern, felt like a flighting bird that has passed through the blinding glare of a lighthouse shaft and, in the cool, comfortable dark again, is uncertain if that dazzle were a dream or reality.

It needed this desolation to show how false had

been that earliest feeling of his, that the land was a watching foe. He saw it now in its indifference. At Ali Gharbi, where the battalions disembarked a year ago, before they were flung in piecemeal as they arrived, there was nothing but the empty muddy banks, the flying spindrift, the sleek and swelling river—nothing but these and the screaming gulls and crows, the kingfishers and tortoises.

At Qurna he transferred to a T boat. Its crew were a sergeant skipper and a corporal engineer. Had they been two men of Kenrick's station in life, their existence together, cooped in this tiny craft, would have been strained and difficult. But they had no scope for ambition, and therefore no room for jealousy. It mattered nothing to them whether battles were lost or won, who was promoted or seconded or transferred or slain. They drew their pay, they did their job, they saved their lives, and by agreement they got drunk alternately. When Kenrick did the trip from Qurna to Busra, the skipper kept his cabin; when he returned, the skipper alertly ran the engines, while the engineer lay helpless in his bunk.

Busra was deserted, except the hospitals. There was no one at Ashar Barracks but a stray or two. Kenrick haunted the Transport offices, to get a boat back. The good-natured colonel in charge casually mentioned a rumour that the Hyderabad Division had been in heavy fighting, and then laughed at Kenrick's uncontrollable excitement to get back.

'There's someone doing your job, isn't there? Then why worry? We're none of us indispensable. Take my advice, and spend a few days loafing while you can. Don't you know any of the doctors in the hospitals?'

'Yes, but——' Kenrick paused, uncertain of the relevance of the question.

'Be a wise man. We've some damn nice girls in Busra. And you're from the front. Men from the front are at a premium in Busra just now.'

He nudged him facetiously; and Kenrick failed to hurry the old fool. To him the whole campaign was a ramp, a deal of fuss over nothing. Happy is the man without imagination, for he shall never be troubled by anything that happens.

But Kenrick got back, and rejoined his mess on Christmas Eve. They were out of the line, and preparing to revel. Lord Curzon had sent every officer in the Mesopotamian Field Force half a bottle of champagne; and a shooting party had brought in some scores of grouse and partridge, while another party had ransacked the canteen.

5

In December, large new drafts leavened the Loamshires with a strong urban element. The newcomers were small shopkeepers, stores and departments men, even petty clerks. They were quaintly civilian in their ways, and drove their ranker officers and regular army N.C.O.'s into fits of volcanic fury.

'Well, Private Sedgebeer, and why do you want leave from your section now?'

'Mr. Broadacre told me that he and Mr. Robjohn were going to have a kind of little tea together, and would like to have me there, sir.'

'Oh, indeed! Yes! Oh! So *Mr.* Broadacre and *Mr.* Robjohn want to have you at a kind of little tea they're having, do they, *Mr.* Sedgebeer?'

'Yes, sir.'

Captain Waggett's indignation, for the first time since he put up his first stripe, failed to supply inspiration for anything more pointed than snorts and emphasis. He felt very shaken. It was his proud belief that every man in D Company of the First Loamshires was in terror of his eye and tongue. A fire was burning there that could leap into scorching flames on the provocation of a word, or less. Much less. Sometimes it was merely his own soldierly sense of the need for discipline that hurled a conflagration on some wretched man. But now he was wondering if that fire was clogging, if it was proving unequal to the tasks this New Army set it. With every sentence from these Derby men a fresh ton of fuel was heaped on it; he could not cope with the magnitude of their offences, the fire became a struggling smoke and heaving, unseen rage.

But 'mistering' was the least of their sins. They quite failed to realise that civilisation had driven them back to its primitive beginnings—that they

were now animals trained and harnessed to slaughter other animals, that the whole purpose of their teachers and rulers was concentrated on this one thing, the welding of them into an efficiently animal being. It was hard to do this in Mesopotamia, with its loneliness —a great inducer of thought—their miseries and misfortunes—which awoke unseemly pity for fellow-sufferers in the trenches opposite—its utter lack of women or brothels. And now the little success attained was being imperilled by these wretched fellows dragged out at the eleventh hour before conscription came. Some of them took little interest even in boxing contests—indeed, had been known to beg off attendance. Mr. Robjohn had wanted 'to have a read at a good book' that a friend had sent him. He pronounced 'good book' with that loving stress and elongation of those excellent medial vowels by which Lancashire expresses deep-withdrawn delight. A 'goo-ood boo-ook' is something that 'the literary world' rarely succeeds in producing. Shakespeare never succeeded, nor did Byron; Conrad and Mr. Aldous Huxley alike have failed. But Bunyan and Dr. Alexander Whyte and the Rev. F. B. Meyer have each produced 'goo-ood boo-ooks,' and these in their inspired examples have risen into the class which is the superlative to the positive (and exceedingly lofty and desirable) excellence of being a 'goo-ood boo-ook.' 'Ay, it's a reet champion book—a gradely book.

Tha mun hev a read at it! When Ah've doon wi' it, like.'

Mr. Robjohn was a Wesleyan local preacher; and Captain Waggett's disapproval was fused into a glowing ecstasy when he overheard—lying snugly against the flat wall of the adjoining main trench—a grave discussion between him and Mr. Broadacre, in 'real life' the superintendent of a Primitive Methodist Sunday School, as to the desirability of Methodist Reunion. After ten minutes of it, he could no longer contain himself in presence of such frivolous waste of good time, and he burst in with all the flashing javelins of sarcasm for which the Regular Army's senior N.C.O.'s are renowned. Captain Waggett had begun the War as a company sergeant-major—and let no one doubt either his unhesitating courage or his proficiency in all that the Army considers proficiency. Our chronicle can omit one of the qualifying adjectives of his address.

'You, with your bloody *Misters* and your bloody civvy airs, and your rot about Methodist Union, when all *you've* bloody well got to do is to kill the bloody Turk, and get us back to some sort of bloody peace again! *You*, Robpeter—or whatever you call your damned name!'

He glared at his victim. Then the never-failing resource of the old sergeant-major came to his aid, and he saw—saw and brought forward—that first and best of all the world's sarcasms, the great 'Face' one.

'Call that a face?' he asked.

Mr. Robjohn did not venture to do so.

'Call that a face? It's a bloody cigarette-holder, that's what it is.' Robjohn did not smoke, and his views on tobacco would perhaps have seemed narrow-minded to Captain Waggett. 'It's a beer-sponge, that's what it is. Shove it over the top, and we shan't need to go for the bloody Turk's damned trenches. It'll scare the lot of them to death. Go on! Shove it up. The bullet hasn't been made that would go through it.'

Waggett found a score of petty ways of persecution; and presently he ran Robjohn in to the colonel. Then, meeting Fletcher, he informed him of what a peccant sheep was in his flock.

'You've got a damned set of conchies in your crew. There's a squealer called Robwilliam or Robharold or Robsomething.' Wit cannot be held in; you can no more stop the regular N.C.O. from being dazzlingly funny than you can keep the bubbling water of the hills from leaping into the sunlight's silver. Captain Waggett was fertile in variations of Robjohn's name; some of these were so happy that when he heard them Robjohn's platoon sergeant could hardly keep his face, good fellow. 'He's been up before the colonel, and he's had a talking to. He's been warned. He's corrupting the men's moral, that's what he's doing. I have to censor his letters, and I've torn a dozen of them up and made

him write them again. He keeps on saying how vile and rotten this War is, and how he hopes the Lord will soon bring peace again. Is *that* the way you teach your men to be good soldiers ?'

'How would you suggest teaching them ?' asked Fletcher, with deceptive meekness.

'Why, give it them *straight from the shoulder*—that's what a padre's here to do. Tell them what bloody swine the Huns are—and about the Turks massacring Armenians—and tell them that any man who's killed on active service goes straight to Heaven. Tell men to be proper Christians—not whining, soft-livered girls with cold feet, but *cheerful* and disciplined and obedient and ready for a bloody scrap. That's my notion of religion.'

Fletcher could have flared up. Three months ago he would have done. But he did not—for, after all, Waggett was capable of kindness as well as ruthlessness ; and everyone knew that in action his courage and alertness were astounding. The officer who has been a ranker often—for reasons that Mr. Bertrand Russell should some day explain to us—takes a savage delight in making the private's day an unintermittent hell pressing at all points and at all moments upon his consciousness. He suspects skrimshanking and shamming and funk on little provocation. But he has been through the misery of the ranks himself—and if a devil *is* a devil, we should remember that it took a Hell to make him one.

Besides, if Fletcher flared up, he would only elicit a burst of rude abuse; also—which was infinitely worse—his offence would be taken out of his men. So he spoke soothingly and persuasively; he explained that these men had all their lives had the misfortune to be immersed in civilian pursuits. It would take time to imbue them with the spirit of the Old Army. He said—and was a true prophet—that when the testing time came, these civilians would do their job as well as even he, Waggett, could desire.

Fletcher was learning why the least 'jesuitical' mind that has ever dwelt in time advised that men should be wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves. Indeed, you cannot be the one unless you are also the other. Robjohn's days became slightly more endurable because of Fletcher's wisdom. Captain Waggett's ferocity was mitigated by a robustious jollity when he related both the provocation and the stinging rebuke that he had administered.

'So I gave the Fancy Religions merchant a piece of my mind,' he concluded.

'Damned generous of you,' said Captain Atkinson, R.A.M.C., in sympathetic tones.

Captain Waggett was pleased; but then he was slightly puzzled. 'Generous?' he queried. 'Why *generous*? You mean it was only natural, don't you?'

'To the noble *all* nobility is natural,' said the doctor courteously. 'But no, I think I meant *generous*. It is always generous to give away what

the hasty observer might think we could not afford to spare. However—to close a moving incident—in the words of our immortal poet,

"Be merciful, great chuck, to men of mould."

And, in the words of the poet again, would you mind passing those pickles on your right? Thank you.'

'You talk a lot of hot air, doctor, if ever a man did,' said Waggett.

Fletcher had first made the acquaintance of the new draft when they were still in the last camp before reaching the division. After a morning service in the Loamshires' lines, Robjohn and Broadacre had come up and spoken to him. They had found out the service in *Orders*, and obtained permission to attend. Could he not go down to their camp that evening, and have a service there? There were fifty or sixty free churchmen in the new draft—several local preachers among them.

Fletcher went. They used hymnals provided by the local Y.M.C.A., and he asked them to choose their own hymns. He was moved, as well as grimly amused, by the promptness with which they chose, and the earnestness with which they sang,

'We're marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion.'

Said Father O'Donnell, when he reported to him afterwards, 'It suggests a defective knowledge of conditions up here. Zion may be their *ultimate*

destination—I've no doubt it will prove so for a good many of the poor beggars, in the next month or so—but they won't find Sannaiyat trenches come up to expectation, if Zion's where they imagine they're marching now.'

But Fletcher's chance of getting to know these new supporters was brief. The morning of Christmas Day, when they were having their first taste of Sannaiyat trenches, a hailstorm succeeded to dawn—a tropic hailstorm, raining jagged stones of ice. It was succeeded by a tornado of wind. Fletcher, calling to his batman, was answered by what seemed to be an animated tent. This portent swept rapidly towards him, and a paroxysm of movement in its centre revealed a face. The wind had leapt from its concealment in Tigris' bed, and with one tug had whoopingly lifted the hundred and fifty pounder where John was setting breakfast from its moorings and enveloped him in its folds.

'Whaur wull ye find a country so damnit?' asked John. 'There's never a wind in the simmer, when ye'd die to hae a breath on't—and in the winter it's juist hurricanes and rain.'

Having breakfasted and held services, Fletcher made his way to the position. He found everyone wretched. The hail had caught them defenceless and had battered them as they stood in the trenches. Now they were in ditches of ice-chill water. A hint from Atkinson told him that the Loamshires might

presently be swung across-stream, to back up the big attacks about to be begun on the right bank.

With the new drafts, two-thirds of his men in this division were in the Loamshires; and if they were sent to the other bank, the number of his men on this side would be exceedingly few. He had learnt how quickly and easily, once fighting began, a padre could be flung loose and find himself far in the rear, with odd handfuls and pockets of men. Afterwards, when all fighting was over, he could rejoin those who survived, and preach to them. He would be justified by the divisional orders that forbade padres to go forward into action. But he would not be justified by either his own self-respect or the respect of the men. He wrote to his chief, and asked to be attached to the Loamshires. In the first week of the New Year he received orders attaching him to them for rations and discipline. These he showed to their colonel, who declined to accept them, observing that any sort of padre is a damned nuisance on active service. Fletcher was persistent—after all, these were his orders, and through him were orders to the colonel. In the end he obtained a contemptuous permission to join the subalterns' mess.

As he came out from the colonel he saw the battalion in rank, about to set out on a practice route march. Second-Lieutenant Greville, a lean six-foot personification of grave mischief, bent forward and

asked him respectfully, 'Are you going to march with us, sir?'

But Fletcher knew that the respectfulness was a snare and a delusion. He shook his head, and went off to make his arrangements.

6

After a week of bluffing, shifting bombardments, Maude set to work to annihilate an isolated pocket of two thousand Turks in Abdul Hassan Mounds, on the right bank. The process took over a week, and the extirpated exacted life for life.

Atkinson called with Fletcher to say farewell to Kenrick. 'There's some straight-ahead butchery planned somewhere, some job that only sheep would carry through,' he announced blithely. 'So we're going to the other side. The Leicesters are coming here in our place. We vanish, and are gone. The Loamshires were here, the Loamshires are gone. *Si monumentum quaeris*, seek for our bones in the desert.

'Prithee, sweet shepherd, think on me awhile.'

Under the mask of his foolery, his excitement was showing. Kenrick guessed that his friend was well pleased at the prospect of action. One need not worry now at the way the show was going in Flanders—need not even read the absurd daily *communiqués* telling of another five yards gained at frantic cost—if one was doing things here.

Atkinson continued, in his delight. 'But Stanley Maude's a bad artist in taking us away. There's no denying it, we added a bucolic touch to these sands of Elam. "Shall us take us haversacks and us water-bottles?" Where'll you hear our blithe Midland Doric again? These plains, sir,' he addressed Abell, 'will be less pastoral than they were.'

'But the Leicesters,' said Abell, 'are reasonably stolid and pastoral, from what I remember of them.'

'They are, sir, they are. They'll do a lot to console you for our loss. The good old genuine English clay, the right chawbacon breed—nothing like it, the world over.

'Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Leicester Loamshire.'

A fortnight later, he was dead. In the hand-to-hand fighting of the Mounds, when the Highland Light Infantry were wiped out, his battalion endured losses hardly less. It was fighting that suited the Loamshires. Brains mattered nothing here, general decency mattered very little. On either side was the valour of despair. It would be the death-knell of civilisation if either Turk or Loamshire dominated the world. But no braver breeds have ever fought hopeless battles. Atkinson through a week of sleepless days and nights ran his aid-post skilfully and coolly, confronting death with jesting face and tongue. A Turkish counter-attack swept the Loamshires out

of their trenches, and Atkinson, standing by his wounded, was bayoneted. His last words were, 'You utter fool! I've got a score of your own wounded that I haven't had a chance to bandage yet.'

Hart's brigade took over Sannaiyat trenches three days before their time. The brigadier called his commanding officers together, and explained that, the day Abdul Hassan Mounds were first attacked, there was to be a sympathetic raid this side, carried out by two officers and twenty-four men from each of his battalions. Darkness was to pass to the accompaniment of half an hour's intense bombardment of the Turkish trenches, by guns both frontal and enfilading, and from the monitors massed in the river. The raiders would lie up close under cover of it, in the low scrub of No Man's Land; they were to go in when it lifted, and for ten minutes to shoot, bomb, stab, do all the mischief they could, observe all they could. Then their officers would sound the klaxons for return. The utmost secrecy was to be maintained.

At this time there were two schools of thought where these lines of Sannaiyat were concerned. One held that they were already practically evacuated, and that we could go through them at any time; but the dominant school believed they were still the old death-trap. Hart's brigadier was an enthusiastic adherent of the former school. He was always chafing at the silly red tape that prevented him from bringing on a general action when he held the forward

area, and there was a certain diffused nervousness in the whole division when the 120th brigade were in the front line, and until they had finished their fortnight and returned. He considered now that a practically bloodless victory was in prospect, that the Turkish lines would be found so lightly held that the raid could be followed up by a rushing of the position. It was with a cheerful heart that he dismissed his officers to use the intervening two days in practising their selected raiders on the dummy position that had been dug behind their own lines, in the vast levels by the marsh.

But Hart knew that the brigadier whose troops would normally have held the trenches at the time when the raid was to take place belonged to the more cautious school of thought—he was heartily sick of war and regarded it with virulent hatred as a long-drawn-out folly run by imbeciles. Why were his men not billed to carry out the raid? Hart's brigadier had told them that it was because two sepoys had deserted to the Turk, who therefore knew on what night the trenches were due to be relieved. Let him put his barrage down on empty communication trenches and a deserted open space leading up to them. The relief would have been carried out in safety and secrecy five days earlier.

Hart did not believe the story. He had occasion to phone to the brigadier now in the forward area; when his business was finished he asked casually

about the desertions. There had been no desertions, General Mason said. What desertions? No, his fellows didn't desert. He was annoyed, and Hart apologised.

It was a lie, then. And they hadn't even bothered to tell Mason about the lie. Damned bad staff-work again. Obviously Mason had refused point-blank to let his brigade chuck away their lives. He was the senior brigadier, and since his one wish was to get out of the whole show he was quite reckless what he said. He *must* have refused. And their own 'cheerful Conrad' had accepted with alacrity.

7

Hart had to select his raiders. And one name rose unbidden from the indeterminate background of the battalion—Hugh Mackay. He could not do it. The boy's brother had been killed at Hanna—wasn't that enough?

Hart had arranged to spend the hour before tea fishing with Hugh. It gave him an excuse for silence while he worked things out. To him there could be no choice as between subaltern and subaltern, where a life was demanded. He might keep Mackay out on the grounds that he was too valuable an officer to be risked. But this show needed his best, if there was anything in it at all—and you could not be *dead* sure there was nothing. It was no use sending a fool over, to surprise and slay and observe. The

only chance of a decent proportion of his men returning was in their having a cool brain with them.

He sent Mackay off to the cook with their spoil. The mess-tent was sending out the strains of 'Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm.' Hart entered, and found Sinclair alone and manipulating the gramophone. Sinclair was neither bacchanalian nor devoted to music; he drank his regular pegs at regular times with Scotch thoroughness of routine, he put on the handiest record when there were a few minutes to spare.

He took off the record, and Hart told him of the raid. He listened silently, then said, 'There's nothing in it—except a butcher's bill. But someone decent has got to be sent across, for the sake of the fellows that go with him. A fool will lose the lot of them, let alone never see a damned thing in the Turco lines.'

'I know. Whom would you send.'

Sinclair thought. 'Spencer wouldn't do, he's too scatter-brained. Nor would Williams; nor Doggett. And Jones is only a little fool. Farquharson might do at a pinch. But no—it'll have to be Mackay and Dowson.'

'They're both too good to lose.'

'They are. But we'll lose the whole bunch if we send Jones or Spencer. If Mackay and Dowson go, with luck we'll get back one of them—and half his command. And if we don't send Mackay now'—he

had read Hart's thought and was thinking alongside of it, in sympathy with his friend's fears—' we'll have to put him into one of the next shows. If he goes now, and comes back, it'll be his turn to stand down. And the next show may be worse than this one.'

' It won't be so damned silly.'

' No. But it may be worse. We've got to carry these lines some day soon.'

In the silence it was tacitly accepted that Mackay and Dowson went. Then Sinclair asked, ' Why are *we* doing this stunt, and not the 125th brigade ? They've no call to put us in five days before our time.'

Hart told him. ' They've had desertions, and the Turk will have a barrage down the day we go in.'

Sinclair was wrathful. ' I'm damned if I see how that'll touch a show that's to take place three days *before* the time when he expects us to get busy.'

' Conrad says there's nothing against us. He believes we'll find we can go through Johnny like a knife through butter.'

' He *would* do. It's just the sort of nightmare stuff he would believe.' Sinclair moved to the telephone.

' What are you going to do ? '

' Phone up the 125th's brigade-major. I want to know about these desertions. I saw the quarter-master of the Nagpurs yesterday, in the canteen, and he said nothing about them.'

' Save your labour. I've phoned already.'

'It's all a damned lie, then?'

Hart nodded.

Next day Kenrick, wandering marshward, went past the duplicate of the enemy position that had been dug there. To his surprise, Hart's battalion were in it. The officers glanced at him with queer, strained look, as if he had no business to see what they were doing; Hart answered his salute, and turned away. But his friend that evening phoned through a request to see him, and explained to him in vague and general terms that they were taking over the trenches five days before their time, and expected some 'liveliness.' He anticipated nothing much; but if anything went wrong—— He finished the sentence with a smile and pressure of Kenrick's hand. Kenrick had to get back to hold his evening parade.

8

Kenrick awoke in the crash and thunder of a world ending, while sheets of lightning quivered and wavered through his forty-pounder without intermission. The air about him was flame without heat. He lifted the flap, and heard rather than saw that the monitors in the river, scarcely a quarter of a mile away, were firing with all their guns. He was slightly in front of two of them; the air overhead was being ripped by their shells.

Knowing no more than Hart had told him, he thought it must be a Turkish attack. We should

repulse it, of course; but there would be forms lying out afterwards. One might be his friend; he was there now, in the walpurgis dance which these invisible demons in the darkness above him were hastening to join—Hart, cool, watchful, with the experience of despair and the reckless valour of his breed, holding his men on the beach of death.

Suddenly, out of the quiet sky of the night trembling to the first hint of dawn, the barrage had fallen, and the Turkish parapets and wire-hung trellises were spouting craters of earth and wood. Under the very eyebrows of that terror a hundred men were lying, with bombs and bayonets gripped. Those shells were wrenching limbs and bodies apart, they were smashing more than earth and wire, more than flesh and blood even. The hope for the waiting figures in the low-curling scrub was that when the tempest lifted and they raced in, they would find themselves confronted by gibbering, nerveless forms who could be slain unresistingly.

Jagged scraps of iron flung back as well as forward, and spun over the heads of the prostrate raiders. From a sound to his left, Hugh Mackay knew that one of his men was a casualty; if he could not return unaided, he must be left here—those were the instructions. Presently Dowson crawled up to him. 'I say,' he shouted (for only so could he be heard in that wild storm), 'two of our fellows are pipped; and what's worse, the same burst of h.e. has finished

my watch. You'll have to give the time to all of us.' Hugh glued his eyes the closer to the luminous dial on his wrist.

'It's *beastly* cold,' Dowson added.

Hugh nodded. Had it been colder even at Hanna, he wondered. It hardly could have been, for the year was nearly three weeks younger. There had been a chill drizzle through the night, and the ground was a clammy, slippery surface. Hugh remembered how at Hanna the rifles were mud-clogged; the Turks had bombed the few defenceless Jats and Black Watch who reached their trenches out again.

They were waiting in that corridor of death through which so many passed in those years of suffering. If the ghosts of those who perished in such raids as this looked back from the calm security of death, what did they remember? Waiting for the lifting of the barrage—the quick, fierce minutes, or, as here, the long-drawn-out fury of half an hour—did they think of next day, and see, as though their very selves were standing by, filled with distress and pity but forbidden speech with the living, the messenger bringing to their lovers in England the word that they were dead? In the soft evening glow of memory, did they see the lawns that they knew and the gardens where they had walked? *Cedes coemptis saltibus et domo.* You must leave your room where you have read and rested and talked, where your eyes have rejoiced in flowers and vases and the neat friendliness of books.

If any memory remained of the last actions and themselves moving destined through the fast-running minutes, there would be quick passions of fear and sudden exultation. There would be the recollected thrill of the colonel's colourless tones stating in unemotional phrasing the task to be undertaken and the information possessed of the enemy's resources at the point of attack. Then the deeper thrill of your own name, and the knowledge of other minds swiftly envisaging your lot and glad that their fate had deflected them beside it. But for these men lying out in that space between the two Sannaiyats there could be no sensation now but physical ones—cold and the earth's damp pressure. And knowledge of time inexorably racing to its plunge and the roar and madness of the cataract.

The barrage lifted; Hugh's wrist-watch told him that their work was due. They rose, and rushed forward. The bombardment had moved the trellises, but the wire was still an entanglement; it held them for a few seconds, but the enemy—if he was there—was too dazed to recover instantaneously. As Hugh topped the confused sand where the parapet had been, he saw Dowson trip on a strand of wire, which tossed him into the trench headlong.

Hugh was in the Turkish front line; his Sikhs, shouting wildly, had leapt in with him. Some of them had found an enemy; he saw men stabbing, men running forward, men trying to escape. In a

bay was a Turkish soldier confronting him; he was sitting back, regarding him, Hugh Mackay, with an expressionless calm, that for a fraction of time held the ready revolver's fire. The dust-coloured face held so passionless a contempt that it seemed as impossible to put a bullet through it as it seemed impossible to Horatio to strike at the royal ghost. But as his conscious self took control again, Hugh would have fired—he did not, because in that moment he saw that his enemy was dead.

From an old sap-head, now a bay, to his right, came a sudden rush of several Turks, shouting, 'Allah!' And Hugh became aware that his revolver was firing; a man fell back, there was a gush of blood from the forehead as the skull cracked across. Two Sikhs beside him were at work with their bayonets. There were three dead bodies clogging their way, and the rest of the enemy huddled back into the sap-head. He followed, intoxicated with a madness that had taken from him all power of thought; he winged another, and yet another, the latter as he was delayed by the first man falling.

There was the rush of an express train, drawing swiftly nearer with thunder gathering in its wheels; then the roar of a shell bursting behind him. Our damned guns were falling short! But a sharper burst, followed by a lone whine in the air, undeceived him. They were trapped! The enemy had held his front line lightly, and all except a handful and those

that our sudden barrage had caught had escaped to pits and pockets in its rear. Now he was aware of what had happened, and his own guns were registering on his front line; his infantry were bombing them from invisible dips in the earth. It was Hanna over again. Hugh ducked by instinct, and another bomb flew over his shoulder. He knew, rather than saw, that one of his men was killed. That whine again! and one of his Sikhs was holding a hand to his eyes, blood trickling through the fingers. They must get out of this sap-head, to the front line; but the Turkish gunners were blowing that to blazes. Still, he must have a try to get his men across No Man's Land. And he must notice, even in flight—his orders were to take stock of the position, to bring back information, as well as to kill. He had forgotten that. The time? He must look at his watch.

Somewhere along the line a klaxon rang out. The ten minutes were up. He lifted his own horn, when something shattered his right hand, so that his revolver fell. He lifted his hand, and it was numb and limp at the wrist; the veins were burst, blood was pumping out furiously. In that moment, figures leapt the trench wall and faced him. His own men, he saw, had gone, except for two tumbled forms. With back to the wall he stood, with useless, weaponless hand. Those figures closed in upon him, bayonets thrust forward.

Later in the day, Lieutenant Jones brought the

authentic news to the 171st. 'Fifty of our fellows were scuppered,' he reported at lunch. 'Only one of the seven officers got back.'

'What about the 95th?' asked Abell.

'They got three chaps back. Dowson was shot through the head as he was sounding his klaxon; and Mackay got trapped somewhere in the front line.'

Dawn next morning showed two naked bodies strung on the repaired wire opposite the 95th. Their hands were outspread, and their buttocks turned to the British lines. General Conrad, furious, would have sent a rescue party to bring them in under cover of night. But Hart dissuaded him.

'That's what he wants, sir. It's been done to drive us hopping mad. He'll have got a machine-gun on them. It would be best to send round orders that there are to be no reprisals and no attempts to bring them in.'

9

Fletcher was not welcomed by the Loamshires with any enthusiasm. To natural indifference was added an underswell of slight resentment, and contempt for the man who would march with them but would be immune from their pains and dangers. But he slipped into his place unobtrusively, thereby avoiding active dislike.

He had joined a mixed enough crowd. There were the rankers. Henderson, slight and cheerful, was

still on the right side of thirty—an absurdly young-faced boy, to have been right through the ranks, a corporal when the War broke out. He was as brave as a lion, and had a reputation for sternness in action. 'He just puts a bullet into any chap that shows the least sign of flinching, does Henders. He keeps his revolver a damned sight too handy.' Yet he was popular, for all his alleged terribleness. His special pal, Noyce, was a hard-bitten man of over forty, a Catholic, a hard liver, a hard drinker. In the few days that he knew Noyce, Fletcher learnt to value his sense of fairness, his utter disregard of self, and his quietness under injustice—of which he had experienced a great deal. Noyce knew that when his claims or those of his pal came up in the quarters where recommendations for military crosses originated, there was always one word said. 'They've got their commissions.' Both he and Henderson had fought through Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Loos, Ypres, as well as the horrible slaughters of the last Mesopotamian spring; and both went to death ribbonless except for the routine decorations. There was a third ranker, Gill, a silent, middle-aged man. He was sober as well as quiet; whereas Noyce and Henderson's nightly practice was to retire beneath their bivvies soon after dinner, there to drink through all the phases of intoxication as it comes to the hard-headed, from raucous songfulness to slumbrous mutterings. There was no authority in the mess, whose senior

member was a lieutenant whose commission dated only a month before Noyce's.

Then there were boys fresh from public schools. Chapman, a girlish, quick-tempered child with querulous voice and high-strung nerves. Marris, beefy and hearty. Chesters, heavy and pompous. Alderton, the athlete, who had played for Kent in cricket. Beales, Bateson, Chalmers, who were nothing in particular, but might have been turned out by a mould.

There were the older men of the public school type. Bruce Graham, haughty, of aristocratic features; he kept to himself, and was treated with great respect. His way with Adams, Mellor, and Franks, who were in a class by themselves—they alternated between being just nasty young men and just objectionable cads of boys—was the way of plain contempt. They dared neither to resent it, nor to take any liberties back. There was Greville, the wag, who knew well the value of his poker face and solemn manner. We have met him already, kindly enquiring of a bewildered padre if he were 'going to march with us, sir.' There was Lambert, lounging and affable—'Uncle Lambert'! He was the one that Fletcher knew best.

It was but a fortnight that Fletcher knew most of them. But in that fortnight men lived swiftly.

The Loamshires crossed the river, and marched to their first camp. This entailed a long detour to reach the bridge of boats some miles downstream. Fletcher

marched with them. That first night, as they flung out on the sands for dinner, everyone was tired; the séance was a brief one. Tempers were frayed, as was shown when Adams—a chubby boy, with incredibly insolent face and exasperatingly exaggerated 'Oxford' tones; he had been a ladies' pet in Busra, before coming up the line, and indeed, in England, ever since he took his commission—asked, 'Lambert, you funny old thing, would you mind passing the bloody bread?'

Now Adams had already worked a reform that many padres would have attempted in vain—because they would not have known how to set about it. To him every creature in the universe was so monotonously bloody that he drained swearing of all its value. Men began to drop it, except when with overstrained courtesy they asked him, 'Adams, would you be so good as to pass the bloody knife as well as the bloody bread, and the bloody jam and the bloody butter at the same time?' But he was impervious to sarcasm, and these things passed idly by him. He remained as he was; it was the rest of the mess who from sheer weariness of certain words fell back on the colourless English which is all that convention approves.

Lambert showed only by a lifting of his brows his resentment at being pawed affectionately by such as Adams. But Bruce Graham, who was within reach of the bread, with a summary thrust of his arm that

was more contemptuous than many words would have been and seemed for a moment to abash even Adams, swung the bread his way, and Gill broke out angrily.

'On my soul, you *are* a rotten little boy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're less than twenty, but as foul-mouthed as a drunken marine.'

'Tootle-oo, Daddy,' said Adams, flourishing his knife at him. 'Don't lose your bloody temper.'

But an apparition confronted them that made the imminent storm swerve aside. Healy, the mess sergeant, came in with the sweet. As the mess stared at him amazed, he grinned self-consciously and hurried away. He was recalled.

'Why . . . why . . . why . . .' began Chesters.

'What the devil have you done with your bloody moustache?' shrilled Adams.

'Shaved it off, sir.'

'The deuce you have!' Henderson assured him. 'You've done a damned sight more. You've been and got a blinking new face altogether. What on earth did you do it for? Your old face was a fair terror. The Turk would never have stood it if he'd once seen it.'

'It was worth a dozen machine-guns to us,' Noyce lamented. 'And what shall we do now? Oh dear, Oh dear, Oh dear!'

But Healy had slipped away.

There was reason for amazement. Hitherto Healy

had worn an appearance indescribable but certainly individual and striking. The whole of his face had been bushed up with hair, out of which enormous side-whiskers thrust menacingly. No Spanish bandit of the films has ever been more horrid, in more senses than one. Now he appeared clean-shaven, unrecognisable as his old self, shorn of the features that had aroused such wit in his officers. What would Captain Waggett say when he next met him? 'Healy, you walkin' furze-bush! You chunk o' goss on two spindle-sticks! You animated mess o' barbed wire! You—why, what's happened? You're not *there*! What *have* you been and done to your old gargoyle?'

The seriousness of the affair as it concerned Captain Waggett struck Bruce Graham. 'It'll break Waggett's heart to see Healy with a face that doesn't justify a joke. We'll have to probe the matter.'

Healy was commanded back and bidden explain this disguise of himself 'in presence of the enemy. Almost a kind of desertion,' said Bruce Graham.

Healy looked sheepishly at Greville. 'Well, sir,' he said at last, 'it's just this. When Mr. Greville come, abaht a fortnight ago, I were in hospital.'

'We know you were, you old malingerer. But they found you out, and fired you. What's this got to do with Mr. Greville?'

Healy scratched his head.

'Come, come, my man,' said Greville. 'You have

brought a false charge against me—in my absence, for you have admitted that I was not here when you were in hospital. What have you got to say for yourself ? '

' Well, sir, I used to do a lot o' poaching afore I joined the Army, like. And Mr. Greville used to manage his brother's estates, like. I was afraid he might recognise me, like. So when they told me what new officers had come, " Mr. Greville," I says. " Is he a tall thin gentleman with auburn 'air ? " '

Greville swung round till he faced him square. ' You mean, you old ruffian, you asked, " Is he a tall thin bloke with ginger hair ? " '

Healy admitted it. ' Begging your pardon, sir, I couldn't repeat them words here, could I ? '

' No,' Bruce Graham agreed. ' It does credit to your sense of tact that you paraphrased them. Go on.'

' Well, sir, I slipped up and had a squint at Mr. Greville, like, and I knowed 'im at once. I'd 'ave knowed 'im anywhere.'

' By my hat, Healy ! ' said Greville. ' But you're changed ! Yet I think—on my soul, I'm sure !—I do recognise you, all the same. Weren't you the ruffian that shot me in the legs with a lot of airgun pellets, after I'd spotted you lying in a ditch and was coming for you ? '

' Begging your pardon, sir, it was Nobby Clark done that. I told him he hadn't ought to have done

it. You always being such a kind gentleman, too, though a bit careful of your game, like ! '

' It was Nobby Clark done that, was it ? I'm much obliged to you for the information. I'll remember it when I get back after all this fun is finished.'

' Begging pardon, sir, but you can't. Nobby's been and got killed at Gallipoli.' He pronounced ' Gallipoli ' as if it rhymed with ' roly-poly.'

Healy's metamorphosis became as great a joy as his former shagginess. Next morning there was tinned rabbit for breakfast ; Greville reproached their caterer at once.

' *Tinned* rabbit, Healy ! This won't do, my fine fellow ! Nice fine morning like this, you should have been out snaring rabbits. *Fresh* bunny next time ! '

At night, Healy was summoned again.

' Bully beef ! ' Greville held it up for his inspection. ' Isn't partridge in season ? or what's wrong with hare ? You'll have the Poachers' Union after you, my man, if this is the way you do your work ! '

Their destination reached, the Loamshires camped in shadow of the high Dujaileh Redoubt which the Turk had abandoned. In these last days of peaceful twilights Fletcher communed much with Lambert.

He tried to place each member of the mess. He had been hurt by Bruce Graham's manner ; he had addressed him as ' Graham,' and been answered, ' My name's *Bruce* Graham.' Bruce Graham was commonly known as ' B.G.' ; but he need not have

been so rude because a newcomer addressed him Brucelessly.

'He's got that beastly *noli me tangere* air,' said Lambert. 'I believe his family motto is, "Wha daur meddle wi' me?" And he lives up to it. No one takes liberties with B.G. Even our company commanders are polite to him. Waggett funks him, because he's what he would call "a real gent"; and the three children know he understands exactly how far their rights go, and will give them those, but wants no closer truck with them. But he's all right. He'll be the last to accept you, but when he accepts you his mind is made up for life. He'll accept you all right, if you have patience.'

As a matter of fact, Bruce Graham was not the last to accept Fletcher. The second day of their Dujaileh sojourn they met by the mess-tent door. Bruce Graham's face was heavy with tidings; he had just thought out a joke. He bent confidentially towards Fletcher, and decided that the padre was worthy to receive it. 'Give peace in our time,' he said; then paused before he added, 'He *may* do, padre. But it will be a near thing.'

Fletcher, going inside the tent, met Mellor, Adams' chum. Mellor was a weak little fool, who could not carry his drink. He had been a choir-boy in a cathedral town, and in real life was a prospective candidate for Holy Orders. He alternated fits of rather maudlin piety with moods of boisterous, tipsy

grossness. Now, prompted by Fletcher's evil angel, he said sighingly, 'When will this war end, padre? It's been going on a hell of a time.'

Fletcher chuckled as he repeated Bruce Graham's jest. Mellor's baby face darkened. 'If there's one thing I do bar,' he announced portentously, 'it's blasphemy.'

Noyce, who overheard the interchange, comforted Fletcher. 'It's nice to know there *is* something that the ruddy little swine *does* bar,' he said.

Fletcher was puzzled by the observance paid to Chesters. Lambert laughed. 'Why, it's plain enough. Chesters keeps his past dark. All he ever says is, "I was in Fleet Street." Now the Army, because it never opens a book, has a most exaggerated and enormous respect for literature. That's why, when anyone comes into our mess, Chesters hangs about in a self-conscious and very beefily obvious fashion, knowing that someone will nudge the guest and whisper, "That's Chesters. He *writes*." And the guest looks at Chesters in an awed way, and when he gets back to his own mess he remarks casually, "I was dining with the Loamshires yesterday, and I met Chesters. Awfully interesting sort of fellow, don't you know? He *writes*."'

'But what does he write?'

'Do you remember that picture in *Punch* last year some time? There's a fat, puffy, spectacled chap before the recruiting board, with his braces over his

shoulder and his shirt half off. And they ask him what he is in real life. And he says, "I'm *Queenie*, of *Home Gossip*." Well, I believe Chesters is *Queenie*, of *Home Gossip*. But he'll be getting a job of some cushy sort pretty soon. Staff-captain or something. Brigadiers like to have a fellow in the offing who *writes*.'

Lambert proved a true prophet. Chesters, though of no conspicuous ability as a soldier, was taken on as under-study to the brigade staff-captain, two days before fighting began; and his old mess knew him no more except as a red-tabbed visitant. They lost also Adams. Adams, who had been drinking a lot too much, managed to raise some fever within a day of their arrival at their new camp. Atkinson, with contemptuous assessment of his value to the battalion, sent him down the line. He went with alacrity.

Their conversations gave Lambert an idea. It gradually came over Fletcher that he was meeting with a new respect from the mess. He mentioned his impression to Lambert, and asked if it was a mistaken one.

'Not at all,' Lambert chuckled. 'Do you remember our talk about Chesters? He *writes*, you know. So I saw a way to help you with our chaps. I mentioned accidentally the other day that you *wrote*.'

Fletcher went red. 'I hope you didn't say that I was *Queenie*, of *Home Gossip*.'

'No,' said Lambert. 'I said I thought you might be *Vindex*, of the *Free Church Intelligence*. The Nonconformists had heard of the *Free Church Intelligence*.'

'There aren't any Nonconformists in our mess.'

'Don't you believe it. A good third of the mess are accustomed to seeing the *Free Church Intelligence* when they are at home. They were impressed no end. Chesters was quoting "an awfully good thing the padre had said," just before you came in this morning; and they all laughed. Your *Free Church Intelligence* connection has made a tremendous hit with the Nonconformists; and that's spread to the other fellows.'

Fletcher was not as pleased as he would have been six months previously.

From their camp they moved swiftly forward on successive nights, till they were part of a semicircle hemming the Turk against the Tigris. It was an unpleasant process, with the spasmodic and desultory falling of shells on imperfectly prepared positions. Gill and Mellor were wounded, and some twenty or thirty of all ranks killed or wounded. Fletcher, despite official discouragement, kept his place with the battalion.

The Loamshires, now three hundred yards from the Turk, were to assault his trenches next morning. Dinner was a scurried meal in a large dug-out. The casual stranger, had he been present, would not have

supposed from the elaborately careless conversation that men's thoughts were plunging restlessly forward, and thinking of dawn.

Greville alleged that Alderton was 'the world's senior second-lieutenant.' Alderton sniffed discontentedly—the allegation came too near a rankling grievance—and denied it. Greville bent forward.

'When were you ordained?' he asked gravely.

'Oh, some time in the autumn of 1915.'

'Second-Lieutenant Alderton,' he said sternly, 'as the world's senior member of the exalted rank that you hold you should set a better example to all members of that rank. You are now hiding something from us. Answer a further question—and answer it truthfully. Where did you purchase your trousseau?'

'You mean my kit.'

Greville vouchsafed a mere nod to such obtuseness. Alderton named a London store.

'Then you were ordained in 1914,' said Greville, triumphantly. 'For Grimshaws went phut in January 1915. On the eighth,' he added, to make the fib more impressive.

'They did not,' said Alderton, hotly.

Bruce Graham interfered. 'You ass, Aldertree, to let Greville pull your leg. Don't you know that lying at sharp notice is his long suit?'

But Greville had dismissed the argument, and was sauntering off. He was asking nobody in particular,

'How much loot would a full loot loot if a full loot could loot loot?'

That evening Atkinson came to Fletcher, and said, 'You've come along with us, padre, and we shan't forget it. But the main thing now is that every man should pull his weight. We can't have you ornamental now.'

'Tell me what I can do.'

'You'll be most use if you'll drop back to our supporting field hospital, and do what you can to push our wounded away down the line. It's not so showy as being with us,' he added, beating down Fletcher's protest. 'But it's more helpful really. A dozen hours saved in getting a man to hospital means operations prevented, amputations saved, even lives saved. And I know these field hospitals. Every man will have his hands full with operating and dressing. It'll be worth everything to us to have an energetic, unscrupulous chap there who'll keep his eyes skinned for transport that's wandering about not knowing where to go or what to do.'

With difficulty he persuaded Fletcher to go. His advice was justified. Through a fortnight of little sleep and intense watchfulness Fletcher developed the gift of switching transport on to his own field hospital, and the Loamshire wounded got so swiftly down the line that Busra assumed their overwhelming disaster three days before it had occurred.

There are official histories of the fortnight of

confused fighting that forced the first of the locks on Kut. The reader may go to them, if he wishes to sort out the tangled story of attack and counter-attack, of bombing up trenches, of new sections of No Man's Land hurriedly sliced with sap-heads, of nullas converted into new trenches, of night and day bombardments and raids. Fletcher carried no memory worth setting down; his story, when I asked him for it, was incoherent in the extreme. He marvelled at two things—at remembering so little that he could make impressive to others, and at his own recollected callousness.

'This is the kind of thing that sticks in my memory,' he told me. 'I used to go up and see our chaps in the line whenever I could. It wasn't very often, we had our hands so full getting the wounded away. But I was up once when the Turk suddenly shoved his coal-boxes on to us. It didn't last long, but for about half an hour he plastered us. We were in fairish shelter—a broad saucer of a nulla where we'd dug trenches—and we didn't suffer too much. But there was a shout over to our left, and presently Shawcross, who had some machine-gunners there supporting us, came and asked Atkinson if he would mind looking at a couple of fellows who'd been hit and deciding if it was worth while bringing them to the aid-post. Atkinson was at his wits' end with jobs to do, and he looked at me without particularly meaning to. "I'll go," I said; "there's no one can be spared here."

Well, I went. It had been a bad business. One of the chaps was still breathing, so I said to Shawcross, "We ought to take him in." So one of his men and I brought him over to Atkinson. But the other fellow——' He stopped, then continued, 'I didn't see his face. There was just a red mess. And I *know* I asked myself, in a flash of thinking, "What's that?" And I *know* I answered, "It's his brains." Yet I didn't care. I didn't even feel disgust. The whole thing was just a matter of routine to me.'

In that fortnight Fletcher got the reputation of being a brave man; I am inclined to believe that he deserved it. It wasn't that he did any more than others—the risks he underwent were of course far fewer than those that his comrades endured night and day. But he did more than his scheduled duty, and did it with a deceptive quietness. That he did not accept his reputation himself was not due to any particular modesty, but because he was angry with himself for things that he remembered.

Once there was a lull in the fighting, and Fletcher was sitting with Lambert in an old trench of the enemy. Someone was careless, climbing on mounds to their rear, and the Turkish guns suddenly sent over a couple of pipsqueaks. They came to earth behind a high sandheap, and their bursting was followed by a confused clamour of voices. Noyce, who was resting in a rifle-pit close to Fletcher, got up.

'There may be someone hit, p'adre,' he said. You'd better go and see.'

'Oh, I don't think so,' said Fletcher.

'I think there is. I heard chaps shouting, probably for stretcher-bearers. It might be one of your fellows.'

But Fletcher did not go. He argued, truthfully enough, that he was fifty yards away from the bursts, that the voices showed that succour was nearer than he was, that Noyce misunderstood the whole affair. Noyce thought of Fletcher's men as needing the comfort of extreme unction, he never clearly visualised the astounding fact that to Fletcher all sacramentalism and symbol were of no importance.

Later in the day, Fletcher learnt that a man had been killed and another wounded. To salve his conscience he told Atkinson he had seen the shells come over, but did not think he could do anything by coming. '*Of course* you could have done nothing,' said Atkinson. 'I was on the spot in a jiffy, and dressed the fellow. You'd have only been an unnecessary man taking on a risk.'

But Fletcher knew that at the time he had been so 'fed up' with slaughter and the tingling wretchedness of fear pulling at nerves that could stand very little more, that he had funked going out into that exposed place whose range the guns had so perfectly. Next day he conquered this feeling, and all through it he worked between field hospital and firing-line, guiding the stretcher-parties. The contrast puzzled Noyce,

who took an opportunity of telling him so. Three of them were discussing the psychology of fear, and Fletcher remarked, quite sincerely, 'I don't understand how fellows go through what they do. For my part, I'm a sheer funk.'

Noyce hesitated, then spoke. 'Well, I'll be frank with you, padre. Between you and me and the gatepost, there was a time when I thought you were. There was a bit of firing going on,' he explained to Henderson, 'and there was a fellow hit somewhere. We could hear them crying out for stretcher-bearers. And the padre didn't half like it, and though he knew he ought to have gone and seen if any of his men was hit he stayed where he was, in a nice snug little bit of cover. But that's all forgotten now,' he added. 'for we know all about the padre. The very next day, when we went through Hell, the padre was out all the time looking for where we'd dropped our wounded. He did that when there was ten times as much firing going on as there was when he funked it.'

'You see, I was too darned busy to think about it,' said Fletcher. 'Besides, I knew I was being useful, whereas the other time I wasn't dead sure that anyone had been hit.'

'You were the only one that wasn't dead sure, then. And you were quite dead sure enough to be glad to keep in shelter where you were,' said Noyce, not unkindly.

That was after five days of fighting. Their

casualties were mounting, but the worst had not yet befallen. Three hundred of the rank and file had been hit, and five officers; Bateson and Franks were dead, Marris and Chalmers were wounded. Captain Waggett was wounded, too, but it was a flesh wound in the arm and he had refused to go.

The enemy was now pressed into a narrow angle against the river. Almost foodless, except for the precarious supply that coracles brought in the darkness, pelted with high explosive—Maude wasted very little shrapnel on him, he simply tore his positions to pieces with heavy metal—he stood at bay. There were two thousand Turks, or less. They sold their lives at a terrific price, but their lives were going. The Loamshires took a fresh line of trenches from them, and the proof of their desperation and valour was on all sides. The enemy's dug-outs, his trenches, even his latrines, were piled with dead.

The eighth day of the fighting, the fog came again and lay heavier than ever. The Turk loomed up suddenly through it, and he swept the Loamshires back, a good five hundred yards. This was the worst day in the regimental history since Albuera. They had gone in only six hundred strong, in spite of the drafts that had just arrived, and they lost four hundred and thirty-seven of all ranks. Two company commanders were killed, the adjutant and second-in-command were wounded; Alderton, Beales, and Atkinson were killed, Noyce, Lambert, and Henderson

received wounds of which they died within the week. Bruce Graham and Greville were among the wounded The Loamshires for the time being ceased to exist.

Fletcher was at the field hospital when the disaster came, but he was up when the avenging assault of the 17th Gurkhas and 79th Sind Rifles had driven the enemy out again. He saw Bruce Graham and Greville brought in. As he said good-bye to them, Bruce Graham pressed his hand. 'Stick by the old crowd if you can, padre. When I come back I'm going to turn Nonconformist. So long. And some of us won't forget all you've done.'

Robjohn had worked in what, judging by his own words, had been a very ineffectively busy fashion, during the early stages of the attacks. He was sore under Captain Waggett's strictures. 'He says I'm a skrimshanker and a conchie, all because I won't say as I think that war's Christian. But the day we went over the top I runned about with my bayonet as hard as anyone.' It was true. Mr. Robjohn had been seen careering excitedly in more directions than one; and if no Turk had been killed by him, that was because no Turk had been good enough to step his way. His energy had come to his company commander's ears; and Waggett, with a spasm of good sense of a kind unusual to him, had set him and his friends Sedgebeer and Broadacre on to stretcher-bearer work. Broadacre was killed, Sedgebeer and Robjohn were wounded. Joyce was wounded early

in the fighting of the first day. He had stayed by Atkinson almost to the end, helping with other wounded, and had then limped to the field hospital. 'I'm mortal weary,' he told Fletcher. 'And I think the Lord knows it, and sent this bullet along, so that I might get a bit of rest.'

10

Kenrick had done his work unthinking. In this flat wet world of colourless earth and colourless skies and colourless water—where men's minds, too, were of one untinted shade, masculine and stoical—there was nothing else to do. Work was duty and the anodyne. Experience was the helpless time of unconsciousness beneath an operation—it is only afterwards that you know what has happened to you. It was the time spent in a train travelling from Bishopsgate to Hackney Downs—let it be got through as unnoticingly as possible, with as slight a draft upon nerves and senses as possible. Lest it darken days *of life* hereafter.

How much of thought had been passing in those darkened chambers where resolve cannot reach and its writ does not run, he did not realise till a word of understanding sympathy—no, it was not a word, for a word could have been set down here, and the reader would see why it mattered; it was but the ghost behind the eyes, that looked and Kenrick's mind saw that a friend knew and was hurt with him—wrung

from him a bitterness that he did not know he harboured. The papers were buzzing with the lie about the German corpse-factory, which Floury Baker doubted; but Kenrick accepted it, and he said, 'There's no peace—not bare existence even—for mankind till they're *smashed.* They're wild beasts, they're not human. If I by mere touching of a button could kill off ten thousand Germans I'd do it. And I'd do it, not in any feeling of revengefulness or anger. It would be simply in the same way that I would clear a sea of sharks by electric currents, if electric currents would do the trick without killing better fish. It would be sanitary work, not cruelty.'

It was Floury Baker who had revealed to Kenrick how much he had suffered. He no more misunderstood this outburst than the sane reader misunderstands the imprecatory psalms. Kenrick was right; it was not revenge that had spoken, it was anguish that had cried out. Baker turned back to the corpse-factory matter.

'We can't judge now, we can't believe what we hear. We know, of course, that many of their leaders *have* reduced all life to a scientific formula. We are each of us so much carbon and oxygen and other chemical stuffs. Even so, padre, it's a long step from *believing* this to getting everyone to let you act upon it in the extreme way this corpse-factory yarn involves. There are so many damned lies flying round now that we'd best not swallow this one.'

'They've shown that they're capable of anything,' said Kenrick.

'They have. And the rank and file of the nation have shown that courage and patience and capacity for infinite suffering are part of that anything, in their case. There's as much bitterness and misery in their hearts as in ours.'

Kenrick helped Fletcher in the readjustments between his going and another padre's taking over his work, by taking a service in a miscellaneous camp across the river. Their doctor attended; and afterwards he spoke to Kenrick. A phrase of the latter's had been misunderstood by him. These were days when a greater number of people than ever before or since were trying in desperate sincerity, with no trace of craving after excitement, to push past death and establish touch with those they loved who had died. The doctor thought Kenrick was one who had succeeded; he had seen his intense preoccupation with death.

But Kenrick had not succeeded. He admitted that he had seen a planchette in the one general stores in Busra—goodness knew what the toy was doing there—and had bought it. Returning upstream to his unit, he had given his hand to it. But the pencil had scrawled idly and no word of purport had emerged.

Evans shook his head. 'That's no good,' he said. 'That wouldn't fetch anything, except the confusion

in your own heart.' He was a grey, shadowy little man, with a face haunted by wretchedness; yet no man that Kenrick ever met so left with him the knowledge of how unquenchable are the courage and hopefulness in the spirit of man. That is why life must go on despite of death; for it is nothing but disease or violence that can kill it. Misery and defeat are powerless.

Evans swiftly told Kenrick of his only son, missing in the Dardanelles. The tragedy was so common in these years that it will be impossible to persuade posterity of its poignancy and dignity. All had gone to the education and commissioning of this boy; and though they knew all was over there remained the wild spectre of possible uncertainty. Without him, there was nothing to live for. Yet Evans knew he and his wife would continue to live.

'There *must* be a way,' he said. 'But you can't expect men and women to find it so long as they are content to live on such a plane of false thinking and false psychology. What do our novelists write about? Love; and nothing else. And by love they mean only the way men and women sway the opposite sex. We simply blind ourselves to the *infinite* number of ways in which we suffer and feel. When life was meant to be, and *is*, a broad-spreading thing, we do everything we can to shut it into one channel. You won't get minds so starved and dishonest to speak with minds that have been shaken free by

death. All the same, with your brother, with my boy——' an exclamation escaped him, of which he was probably hardly conscious, that showed the intensity of his suffering—' there *must* be a way. I shall find it if any man ever did.'

Letters written since his brother died had reached Kenrick; there were sentences in them that blew like a wind of agony across his days, sharpening the frost of his own despair.

CHAPTER SIX

1

IT was February, and the Turk had been the anvil of unceasing blows for two months. God knows that enough fine steel of our own had been broken on him. Maude had cleaned up the dips and holes in the right bank of the river, where the enemy had left small groups of his men, a thousand here, two thousand there. At Hai head, with infinite valour and suffering, we had thrust a spear into his heart, and he was dying. It had been trench to trench work, with bomb and bayonet, and it cost us seventeen thousand casualties.

February was in its second week when Floury Baker, who had a care for less tangible things than flamingo flocks, burst in on Hart, all eagerness. 'You heard anything?' he asked.

'Lille's been taken again,' said his friend carelessly.

'That's the seventh time in the last fortnight, isn't it? Good Lord, we're winning the War several times over. We'll have to put the Boche in for a second innings.'

'Message from Signals that Greece has come in again,' Sinclair called over derisively, from the table

where he was drafting messages. 'And the Italians have advanced five yards towards Gorizia, on a ten yard front.'

'And subsequently advanced ten yards back from Gorizia, losing quantities of ice-cream and mandolins,' Floury surmised. 'But I want you chaps to put down your lessons and listen to me. I've been down to Sheikh Saad. Immoral place, Sheikh Saad—all chatter and beach-rumours. Well, there was a brass hat there from G.H.Q., talking bigly in his cups; and he said that Johnny must be getting worried about what he wittily called his "sensitive left flank," now that things are all going wrong with his insensitive right flank.'

'Sensitive left flank?' asked the matter-of-fact Sinclair, musingly.

'That's opposite *us*,' Baker explained. 'And the brass hat, who of course was only repeating what he had heard his boss saying, thought that Johnny's going to have a shot to break through, and to cut our communications at Arab Village—to get right behind our fellows who are hammering at Kut.'

'He'll never be such a damned fool,' said Hart pessimistically. 'He hasn't handed over his command to one of the generals he captured from us, has he?'

'No. But the thing is so darned silly that G.H.Q. feel it is just what they'd do in Johnny's place. So we are to forestall it by attacking here.'

'I believe *that's* pukka,' said Hart. 'I had a chat

with cheerful Conrad yesterday. *He's* talking of a " bloodless advance " this side. Says that Johnny is going to play the gentleman, and hop the parados, leaving us the honours of war and the famous Sannaiyat position.'

' For nixes ? ' asked Floury, derisively.

' Sure. Conrad argues that Johnny has always done this. He slipped away from Sheikh Saad, from the Wadi, from Hanna, from Dujaileh.'

' After putting up a free show ? ' said the persistent one. ' My old school-chum, you are doing yourself less than justice. It is not your better self that is talking this hot air. Johnny never chucks away an orange while there's juice in it. There's still juice in this one. He knows he will have to give us Sannaiyat this time, but he can demand, and get, two thousand casualties as its price. He'll do it. But I want to cheer you with the beach-rumours of Sheikh Saad. Let us first take what are technically known as " other ranks." There are at the present moment between fifteen and twenty thousand sergeants and corporals at Sheikh Saad. Each one of these stout fellows has seen *with his own eyes* mysterious semi-submarines, armoured against rifle and machine-gun fire, which are to rush troops up the Tigris, to behind Sannaiyat, and trap the musing Abdul between them and us. We can then butcher him at our ease and leisure, if he won't surrender. What think you of the play ? '

'You've been talking with the Navy,' said the scandalised Hart. 'The dear chaps see unicorns and fabulous things all day long, and at night dream of bloodless battles won by the noises they make. They shoot into unoccupied desert all through the hours of light, and then their observer reports that every other shell landed in a full communication trench and shifted fifty of the enemy at one explosion.'

'Hart,' said Floury, 'it is the voice of the infantryman, unjust and envious, that speaks in you. You have never realised the power of divine shooting. You have never been properly grateful for all the science and terror that we put behind your cruder methods.'

'All I know is, in our last fortnight in the trenches the only deaths that were definitely traceable to our artillery action were those of a dozen of our own fellows. But go on, tell me more about these visions.'

'Well, the submarine rush upstream is to be a V.C. stunt.'

'It would be. The M.C. isn't given posthumously. Floury, I won't rule it out as impossible. After the *Julnar* stunt I believe the Powers are capable of anything. Go on.'

'We will now go higher, and learn what the commissioned populace of Sheikh Saad holds. Among these there are two schools of thought.'

'Ought you to use that word?'

'There is no other—unless you care to say cerebration, as expressing merely the fact that *some* sort of mental process takes place, without claiming that the process is intelligent or intelligible.' Floury paused, pleased with his effort.

'Pass the phrase,' said the umpire. 'Go on. *School of thought's* your cue'

'One school of thought is prepared to *prove* that Sannaiyat *must* be taken before anything else is done. The other asserts that Sannaiyat is impregnable, that no good purpose is served by taking it, and that we shall therefore hold Johnny pinned here till our other lads have crossed the river behind him, when we can roll him up and scupper him completely. The latter school talks such plain sense that I think we may assume that G.H.Q. will decide on acting otherwise.'

Floury's foolery did not hide the fact that he was sure that the fourth battle of Sannaiyat was about to take place. Whatever might be thought at Sheikh Saad, twenty miles away, on the spot this conviction gripped all ranks. Grim jesting, like the sudden rifting across of the calm face of a frozen lake, revealed the depth below. Abdul was alleged to vacate his trenches during the heavy bombardments, to sit philosophically on the marsh-edges till the rowdy business ended. Unauthorised 'news' was sent round the Hyderabad Division: President Wilson had placed an order with Krupps for another type-

writer, Greece had again 'come in' and—the two items were circulated simultaneously, on the same slip of paper—the Absoolotly Nootral Battery had 'at last decided to cast in their lot with us.' This was a right bank battery which the infantry alleged to be impartial in its hate; since in places scarcely eighty yards separated the opposing armies, it was not hard to plaster your own side as often as the enemy.

2

Orders came, to bite off the section of the enemy's position that lay against the river; after that, all approaches were to be double-blocked sixty yards forward, and the rest contained. This was to happen on the 17th.

Hart and Kenrick were onlookers, for their brigades were in support. Hart could have wished it otherwise; it would be better to be flung into action. But he was reasonably busied, as it happened, for his battalion had to help in the very heavy carrying fatigues that accumulated ammunition in the front lines. Rain fell, and the trenches were churned into bogs beneath the laden men. Water did not sink in this soil, but lasted till the sun dried it up, a natural glue in which a man might be held fast, would slide and stumble, but could not sink. There is nowhere else such mud, tenacious in its amalgam of sand and clay and oil and salts; in no other mud in the world does it cost so much toil and blasphemy to make a

hundred yards.' Floury Baker, sent to confer with the assaulting troops as to the artillery support, dispassionately assessed the chances to his own brigadier afterwards.

'They'll probably carry the front two lines right enough. But we shan't keep them an hour. One would have thought that Hanna would have been sufficient to show that you can't mix fighting and mud polo. It'll be Hanna over again, though, thank God, on a smaller scale.'

'I don't suppose Maude cares a damn whether we carry the lines or not,' said General Carthill. 'The main thing is, to keep Johnny busy here while something happens the other side. Maude can afford to chuck away a thousand infantry here, if he gets across the Tigris. All the same, I hope someone will see that we get value for our money.'

But the dragon kept his den a while longer. Zero was postponed from noon to 2 p.m., when the curtain of fire was dropped and two Indian battalions crossed the narrow isthmus between the opposing armies. They took, and held for forty minutes longer than the pessimist had predicted, the enemy's front two lines by the river, despite the loss of all their British officers and the heavy and accurate fire that swept their new position. But there was no chance of support; the communication trenches behind the British lines were congested with men coming up, and wounded and stretcher-bearers trying to get down,

and were churned, besides, into swamp. Under the long-continued torment, one battalion returned from the Turkish lines, and the other had to follow. The fourth battle of Sannaiyat was over.

3

In one sense it *had* been Hanna over again for Hart. He had again watched while another brigade went forward to a useless task. His battalion were in reserve; but they were aligned on the marsh side, where the main rush of over bullets and shell fragments went widely by them. Hart could have found the strays teasing, from the caprice with which luck swung them suddenly out of their normal course. But he was driving himself abroad, to be with those dark silhouettes that swept across No Man's Land, like rain impelled by some invisible wind. He and his men would be impelled so, when this attack had failed.

It was pretty plain how things were. The guns would screen them to the enemy's line; 'nerves' were busy opposite, even behind the actual incidence of our barrage, for the machine-guns and rifles were sending their bullets high. And the first two lines were thinly enough held. But Hart saw that it was fatal to stay there. Five minutes had not passed before the Turkish barrage pounced on his own front line. It was there that wavering would come; and on the heels of wavering a counter-attack would sweep the stormers back, into the wide shelterless

ditch between the two positions. That ditch—lately No Man's Land where groups had prowled nightly—he saw dotted with figures limping back, with stretcher-bearers carrying other wounded. Men died here, whom Death had struck at lightly, sparing their lives.

And then the whole affair was blotted out in twilight and effort's stagnation. Night followed, bitterly cold, and day succeeded bringing rest and depression.

The fifth battle of Sannaiyat opened at ten of the morning of the 22nd.

4

It was preceded by so much inevitable slow fussing that Hart fretted and grew irritated. He checked himself, as a man suddenly coming face to face with a full-length mirror might stop. He realised that a film of vexation was overlaying the whole surface of his life and thought. If that was to be established, he was a proved fool and his battle lost. Life is nowhere, except in fiction and the dreams of adolescence, romance, heroism, loveliness. But it is the formation of something, the gathering of cells of memory and habit of some kind or other. Hart was ashamed and scornful that he, a grown man, was demanding more of life, in this dragging passage of preparation for action, than that it should somehow flow away and vanish.

Through the night they were moving, men thrusting hither and thither; the assaulting battalions were

in their places of assembly by eight a.m. There were annoying calls to the telephone, some of them trivial in the extreme. Not once, but often, Hart had to remind himself to banish fretfulness. In face of the folly that the World War compelled men to go through, any subsidiary folly of yielding to the momentary stabs at one's peace of mind was unthinkable.

Sinclair, as second-in-command, was to stay out of the assault, which Hart would lead himself. Not for the first time, Hart blessed the Scot's composure and matter-of-fact. Sinclair was busy, seeing that bombing and blocking parties knew their programmes, that Lewis gunners were ready; he was humming cheerfully. As it drew towards zero, he prepared to withdraw to the third line; in another five minutes the Turk would be plastering the place where they now stood. He pressed his O.C.'s hand, and said, 'Good luck, sir!' Saluting, he turned to go; the humming changed to low, articulate song:

'Some folk said Susanna was mad! Just fancy!'

Hart's face relaxed into grim, spontaneous amusement. It certainly seemed extraordinary that anyone had bothered to bring such a charge. Their standards of madness must have been less tolerant than ours. Susanna's incessant sarabanding was an innocuous eccentricity to that in which the world was now engaged. We had pulled in with us these Indians also.

The air overhead was ripped with noise—myriads of invisible wheels and wings were hurrying through it. The haunted skies above the Brocken fill so, when warlocks and familiars sweep to revel. A deafening crash followed, the barrage bursting on the enemy front line. Two minutes later, the enemy guns searched our position; there were casualties in the infantry making gaps in their wire, to race across No Man's Land. Hart swung aside the section of the *chevaux de frise* in his immediate front; he carried a wire-cutter with his ready revolver. These guns that were bursting on our lines were field guns—swift pipsqueaks that exploded and were past you before you heard them. Our own guns made such a roof overhead that he did not hear the swift, steady nearing of the heavier guns that the enemy kept far back, until a huge crater opened in No Man's Land, and a vast black smoke-flower expanded. It changed, to a snaky-tressed pythoness, with swaying, wavering skirts. Susanna was dancing. And in that queer dream-life on which he had been precipitated, Hart laughed—a quiet noise which was all he heard in that shock of shattering earth and lives; and in a moment he knew that the ghost of this house of Sannaiyat would not vex him to-day. The impalpable could find no incarnation, with palpable foes not eighty yards away, and his own mind standing so apart from its dreams that it could be amused by them. There was no pause or waiting to be gone

through; the necessary thinking would be done by unconscious hands and feet and eyes.

So dense was the cloud of smoke and dust now that they almost stumbled on the enemy front line. The bombardment had been magnificently efficient; wire and wooden stands had been tossed aside, the parapet looked as if earthquakes had criss-crossed it. There were few Turks, and the bombers accounted for them while their companions ripped and pulled aside what was left of the wire. The trench had been left almost empty; Hart saw two faces, one insane with terror, the other desperate. His revolver cracked simultaneously with rifles of men behind him, and there were only corpses fronting him. The trench was six or seven feet wide, a ditch that fully equipped men could not leap. But Hart saw a traverse that was narrower, and shouted to Farquharson that there must be other places that could be jumped. If they all took the one crossing it would be too generous a gift to the machine-guns. He was over the trench, and leading to the second line; they were following on the skirts of their own barrage, now plunging on the third line of trenches. The Turkish machine-gunners began to see them clearly, men were dropping faster. But where was the second line? Hart's mind was working swiftly, he guessed what had happened. Since the abortive assault of nearly a week ago, the Turk had filled in his shallow second line over considerable sections, to give him a long

unimpeded sweep of fire. Cover must be found somewhere, or it was annihilation. Hart started at a gap in the ground, an old irrigation channel scarcely eighteen inches deep and twice as wide. The battalion disappeared into it, and burrowed out of sight.

This was Abdul's last battle to save Kut; he fought it magnificently. The scales were tilting against him. Even the Desert Gods changed sides. Last year storm and flood had been battalions for him; this year they were quiet, except for the rain that had parried our first stroke at Sannaiyat. He had barely three and a half thousand bayonets, facing the massed guns of two divisions and the ships in the river. He made six counter-attacks; our artillery blew them to pieces, but the survivors came on. An invisible flame of death swept before them, licking them up, shrivelling the edges of this terrible valour; only two attacks touched our line, the rest were blotted out without escape. Last of all, he fled because the river had been crossed in his rear, and another army was astride his retreat; he got clean away, leaving only dead and desperately wounded prisoners, and nothing of value.

The 95th tossed up a parapet to the nulla; and Hart, looking along the line, saw that their mood was assured. This was a winning battle. Those nightly gun-flashes from the other bank, growing week by week further and further away, had told of victory there; and they knew that the enemy whom they

were now evicting had other foes striking at his back. The 95th held the river-end; and the machine-guns from Crofton's O. Pip were sweeping the sandy beach and the edges of the enemy's third line.

Half an hour had passed since they set out across No Man's Land. The enemy's machine-guns were firing high, for the most part, and his artillery were searching his old front line and No Man's Land, holding back our reserves as far as possible. Hart was suddenly aware of commotion to his left, and saw that a party of the 95th had been bombed out of the nulla by Turks who had crept up under cover of the river-side bluffs. He rallied them, and they regained their position with a rush. They had just done this when the Turkish guns shortened their range and felt for the nulla. There was a huge spouting of sand, which rained over Hart and his immediate meinie. Iron splinters sang their way over and into the trench, there was a direct hit somewhere to his left, men were being killed and wounded. But the gunners were rattled, our own shooting, the most terrific thing Mesopotamia had known, was searching their batteries. The barrage was a poor preparation for the counter-attack which followed. The Sikhs grew exultant as their own fire thinned out to uselessness the gallant few who got past the shell-bursts. Farquharson's revolver picked out the last survivor, still yards short of the nulla.

A second tiny counter-attack followed quickly,

and was blasted away. It was half an hour before the third came, this time against the Scots battalion to their right; the interval was spent in consolidation, and sappers brought telephone lines up. Hart sent back requests for sandbags, and in reply was plagued with questions, sent down from division at the urgency of corps, miles away, as to what his casualties had been. How on earth was he to know? This question rasped on his nerves at steady intervals throughout the day. As if he had nothing to do but to count heads!

Damn! our own guns were falling short. That was a direct hit on the Scots battalion; here were other shells ploughing the desert behind our backs. This, too, remained a chief annoyance of the day; and he had to send back repeated complaints that our own guns were causing him casualties. It was hard to locate the offenders; they were thought to be enfilade guns, from the other bank. One how was particularly persistent, and ultimately made the river-end of the line untenable.

The telephone sent in news, not all of it cheering. A direct hit had wiped out headquarters of a supporting battalion, the 5th Seonees. Hart knew their colonel, Lyon, well; he was as near to being a friend as anyone outside his own battalion, except Kenrick and Floury Baker. He learnt, too, that the Scots battalion to his right were confident, and reported their lines consolidated against counter-attack. His

own men also looked as if they would not be easily shifted. The nulla's course was so zigzag and irregular, that the Turkish gunners rarely made a direct hit; if men's faces blanched when the suddenly down-swooping terror smashed a comrade's body, they grew sternly resolute again as they saw the mangled line of their enemies' failure.

But the hour and a half that followed were a mist of horror. Both Hart and the O.C. of the Scots battalion had to send back at last urgent requests that our own barrage should cease. He could see by the faces of his men that they could not endure through much more of this fire that swept against their backs. His casualties were already heavy, and they were being minutely augmented by our own artillery. When the barrage was withdrawn a small counter-attack was withered away by small arms fire; the one gun that persisted in helping, a 4.5, burst steadily along our own line. Brigade rapped back that they could not discover where it was firing from. It was no good cursing the Absolootly Nootral Battery, for they were demonstrably not falling this side for once. 'Gun appears to be firing from our right rear,' Brigade at last reported helpfully. The enemy, too, grew more troublesome. He still held his original front lines at the marsh-end, which another brigade were to carry in the afternoon. He was few in number, but desperate in valour; as one, two, three hours passed, and he grew accustomed to

the presence of foes between him and the river, he became bolder, and sniped annoyingly. Under shelter of the river-bluffs, also, and along his communication trenches, although he was double-blocked from rushing our lines by their means, he developed bombing attacks. And then, a minute before the half hour after noon, an enemy shell burst directly on the nulla, killing Farquharson and half a dozen men of his Lewis gun section. But for this the line would have held against the new, strong counter-attack massing below the river's protecting curve of embankment. Hart had lost seven officers already, and so many men that he had had to send back for reinforcement, and had been given a company from a supporting battalion. Farquharson was the best of his subalterns, and had been the life and soul of the defence which had crumpled up the earlier attacks.

The burst was the herald of a fierce plunging fire; when the brief purgatory lifted a heavier mass than in any previous counter-attack came on. Our barrage, which by request had ceased performing, opened late, in response to the forward observing officer's message. Even so the enemy suffered horribly; bodies were hurled up by the shells that tore through the ranks. But a remnant came on, and were now so near that their only chance of life was to go on. The 95th's officers exposed themselves, to break this attack in the open. Captain Alder,

who commanded the new company sent as reinforcement, was shot through the head; another company commander, Willis, was wounded with a bomb. Hart saw his left wing rise as one man, and stream away; the right wing followed. He found himself almost alone; then his revolver was empty—it had found targets—and he was fighting a very bewildered Turk with his bare fists. But his danger had been seen, before he was aware of its imminence, by the famous Scots battalion who formed his battalion's right flank, and they had sent in parties, just as another company from the Indian battalion in support came up. His Sikhs took heart, and returned. Five minutes' work with bomb and bayonet and revolver finished the gallant enemy in their midst. But the battle was inextricably mixed. There were groups of the enemy running back from the old No Man's Land which the fugitives of the 95th were now recrossing; others were taking cover behind the parados of their old first line, or hugging the river-bunds. Our barrage and the machine-guns from the right bank were devastating this fusion of friend and foe. Hart ordered the mixed force with him, of Scots and Sikhs and men from the supporting battalion, to use the recaptured nulla as a double front, against the lately triumphant but now retreating enemy, and against the new wave of counter-attack that was probable. It was necessary to consolidate two bays that were full of enemy wounded; this was

done, swiftly and—for war—mercifully, by half a dozen bombs. The bodies were thrown out, parapet and parados were restored. Luckily, the second wave of counter-attack did not follow; and the enemy, trapped by this nulla across his retreat, was shot down to a man.

During another hour and a half threatened attacks hung about the front like thunder-clouds, and the nightmare life of bombing and counter-bombing, of barrage and counter-barrage, went on. Maude, informed by his eyes in the air above the twenty miles of battle raging between Sannaiyat and Kut, passed on to the Hyderabad Division word of reinforcements marching to hold this gate for the enemy, and of heavier counter-attacks massing beside the river. He suggested that 'Plan 4,' which was the rushing of the position where the marsh flanked it, be at once put into operation, to relieve the two depleted battalions clinging to the battered river-rim. Hart sent back for British officers, and two were sent, who took over the work of commanding companies that had but one unwounded subaltern apiece. Then, under cover of an intense bombardment, the rest of the enemy's two front lines was taken by the 120th brigade. It was ignoble rabbit-shooting to catch the few Turks who escaped, and tried to get to their own third line. Hart felt ashamed to see the running figures crumple up and fall huddled. There was no glory in this damnable business of

drilling holes in flesh and tearing it with machinery and explosive.

But the Turk had fight left. Forty minutes later, an Indian battalion of the new brigade, who had lost all their British officers—picked out in crossing No Man's Land, by an enemy who had lived so long in hell that his eyes were unblurred by any fears, and his hand fatalistic and unshaking—began to fall back. Tempers were frayed; an excited subaltern of the British battalion whose flank was now exposed rushed up to his brigadier, who had originally been an officer of an Indian battalion, and said, 'You say your Indians aren't funks? Look at your bloody niggers! Look at them, sir! Are they running, or are they not?' The subaltern was one of the British battalion's officers in reserve. It says much for General Conrad's magnanimity that the questioner heard nothing of the incident when the battle was over. But perhaps it had hardly been noticed. When a battle quivers in suspense the air fills with strange noises of madness. The spirit, with eyes peering into the darkness that is fast unfolding itself, does not heed them.

It was a brief wavering, swiftly recovered. Again, the Scots battalion restored the battle by extending their front into vacated trenches; within ten minutes the fugitives were back. Night closed down on the situation firmly in hand; the hours of dark were busy to desperation. Patrols were pushing out, and

ceaselessly feeling along the enemy's communication trenches, casualties were being ascertained, information was sent in and information was asked for, parapets were thrown up. Dawn rose on both sides facing each other warily. A night of digging after a day of fighting had left the attackers exhausted.

But a word might infuse vigour or slay all hope. Such a word came to both armies, early in the morning, with news that Maude had crossed the river, twenty miles behind Sannaiyat, and was straddling the Turks' retreat. The 95th and the Scots regiment to its right pushed out patrols, and felt for the enemy. His third line was deserted, so they occupied it with a spray of pickets, lightly sprinkled—for the lion they were hunting was a magnificent beast, and even his death-springs might cost many lives. If this emptying of his line was a trap, a handful of men could be withdrawn swiftly. The handful were further attenuated, in a thin surf of patrols flung up to the beach of the fourth line. This was found to be held, so the patrols were recalled, and the wires sent a message to the artillery. The artillery answered, searching this fourth line; and the Turkish shells came plunging along our own trenches. This was the most trying experience of all, when tired-out men waited for dark to come.

Late at night, a fresh brigade took over. Hart's physical weariness was at the point where comfort was preferred to cover, space and air to safety. He

slept in the virgin plats between the Turkish old front lines, close to that scrubbed No Man's Land where the dead now lay thickly. His bed was dry, for the trenches drained it; he could feel soft green grass all about him, and the scents of flowers. Buried in their ditches, both sides had forgotten the passing of the seasons, that were all one monotony of discomfort and wasted time. But the spring had been in ambush here; now that there was a lull in their folly they were aware of her.

On the horizon guns were flashing. Overhead was the starlight into which Chaldean shepherds looked when men first became aware of other worlds. Hart had never noticed how dazzlingly—no, comfortingly—clear this Mesopotamian starlight was. He found himself wondering of stories casually read and dimly remembered—of Tiamat and Hammurabi—which was god and which was king? One had predicted an eclipse, the other had slain the primeval dragon of darkness. Or had he got them both mixed? He thought drowsily of Abraham and Nehemiah and Layard and Townshend. Wondering and thinking, he fell asleep.

5

To those who have never known the experience of modern battle the story of the last fight for Sannaiyat, as I have told it, will seem all wrong. A battle is a very terrifying and sombre thing. Of necessity

—they will think—it must be made up of a great many moments of intense terror, agony, exultation, courage. There must be many psychological crises, when a man has to face some livid beast that has swum up from subterranean pools of his own life, some beast of cowardice or weakness of will. Hart, as we have seen, feared that this would happen. Fear and glory, failure and conquest, these are the beacons—low, smouldering fires of doom or leaping flames of triumph—that light up the hours when men slay and are slain.

But in reality it is not so. War makes the will a machine which rarely breaks down when revolving at full speed. It breaks down from accumulating weariness—the wheels of the body clog, not those of the mind. Sometimes it breaks because overwhelming force of adverse circumstance bends it beyond endurance. This is what happened to the Turks when, dazed by the terrible bombardments under curtain of which their enemies had come rushing forward, they heard that a second army was across their retreat. It breaks most of all in the pauses between action, when the pauses are long enough for numbness to tingle with life again and for thought to be possible. It is then that the hopelessness of this pitting of flesh and blood against machinery grips the brain. It is then that men feel the ignoble folly of it all, of being a tool in the grasp of the men who are not fighting but merely

arranging how long others shall go on fighting for their convenience or aggrandisement or mental excitement.

During lulls in the battle, when Hart had been able to *see*—not simply, with the lower, automatic faculties of the mind, to be aware that they were there—the broken bodies and to hear the cries of the wounded whom no one could help, especially the wounded Turks who lay miserably in front of their lines, he had known moments of infirmity of resolve. His imagination put him where they were; he recalled that hideous day of helplessness, the imbecile terror with which the mind waited for the noise of a shell's passage your way or expected a bullet. The maimed cannot flee, they are compelled to lie for death to play with, as a cat plays with a mouse. It would be more merciful if, like the cat, death always in the end slew those he has played with.

It had been a long-drawn-out torment, too, the infinitely slow coagulation in the trenches of the human waterdrops who were to become a tide swirling the enemy out of the lines he had held so long. It was too like the infernal assembling, ten months ago, before we started on our long exposed crawl to destruction. But this time—the mind fortified itself by much repetition of this—there would be no dragging through darkened debris-strewn plain, a process such as that by which water silts and sifts its way forward, stumbling and checking at this earth-clot, fingering its way into that soft pan of depressed

ground. There would be no inexorable opening of dawn on the blackness, the deliberate gradual lighting up of your arena by powers of nature that hated you with a malignant, contemptuous anger—to whom (though you were English and had read books and had cultivated the emotions and senses and pondered as to a meaning behind life) you were so much human rubble, to be brushed from the face of even this worthless land. It would be a swift race across less than a hundred yards, a matter of seconds only. And then—well, if one thing is certain in war, it is the chance of luck. In Hart's experience, luck had been almost uniformly bad. But it could be good, he knew; sometimes, when all the signs pointed to a bloody struggle, you came upon an empty position or a cowed foe.

This time there was everything to buoy the man who thought too much, as Hart did. The particular folly which made the whole affair in each of its disparate episodes so loathly was absent. If Maude were crossing the stream behind Sannaiyat, then these Turks must be pinned here. Their fighting would be desperate, but it would be distracted. They *might*—possibly—be mopped up, by surrender or massacre. For once, a blow might make a difference, it might go far towards ending the war on this front. It might be a perceptible heartening of the poor devils who were in the hopeless hell of Flanders.

During the action itself, Hart was careful, so far as he could, not to feel or think at all. Long before the guns opened, he shut off all mental activity, and gazed blankly forward. All emotion was held in abeyance. The higher powers of the spirit tacitly accepted the time as to be reckoned non-existent. It would flow away; and all this concentrated suffering, these sights of blood and fury, would soon be a sentence—two sentences, perhaps—in *Reuters*. 'Yesterday, after bombardment, our infantry captured the enemy's position at Sannaiyat, on a front of several hundred yards, taking prisoners. The situation is being consolidated.' That would mean nothing, now or at any subsequent time, to the people reading it at breakfast. And, though the telegrams that followed to some hundreds of homes, with the name of one who was lying dead in the desert, would mean more—to a few—than word of a kingdom captured, those few in their aggregate would be only a drop in the infinite waters of mankind. They could neither share their sorrow nor explain it. A little later, their minds that held this sorrow would no longer move amid men, and their suffering would have been cleansed out of the stuff of time, that keeps no lasting stain from any grief.

In the thought of Hart and his comrades, too, the memory of forty hours of tense watchfulness and physical effort would be a confused blur, a shadow from which nothing coherent of light and darkness

could be extricated. Consciousness would have sunk into the grey indeterminate whence it arose.

6

Kenrick's battalion were in the brigade that made the afternoon assault. Their testing was perhaps the severer, for the Turkish barrage fell chiefly on our old front lines, where it was quite rightly supposed that our supports were assembling. The enemy gunners had had no lack of practice to make their registration exact. Kenrick's battalion lost eighty men before ever they went over.

He had chosen his aid-post by Abell's advice; it was in the third line, towards the marsh end. Here it would escape enfilade fire from that part of the Turkish lines which thrust a promontory into the marsh; and a direct hit would be unlikely. There was reasonable shelter from strays, whether bullets or splinters.

It was a fortunate introduction—if any introduction can be called fortunate—into modern warfare. The zone of fire thinned perceptibly on these edges; the bullets that went singing over could be heard splashing harmlessly on mud or water beyond. Kenrick saw the faces of his wounded change, from the sullen fatalism of those who came first, to the amazing cheerfulness of those brought in during the last hours. At first, the battle seemed to have ebbs as well as flowings forward. The sudden spasms

of intense artillery fire that marked enemy counter-attacks were a racket that awakened echoes in a world that underlay the physical one of hearing. It seemed to be touch and go, when fugitives came in from the counter-attack that for a while partly succeeded. Two men belonging to Hart's regiment wandered into Kenrick's aid-post, with gunshot wounds in their arms. They had a bewildered story, in course of which they asseverated that the colonel saheb had been killed. It seemed only too likely that Hart would be killed if anyone were. The news chilled Kenrick, and was an anodyne against all feeling of danger. If Hart had gone, it did not really matter what happened to anyone now.

Kenrick found himself judging of human events by their repercussion on men. War was not a matter of manœuvres, of valour and moral, of glorious assaults and splendid defences. But of faces set or smiling. He thought of his old colleagues in China, whom he had forgotten for weeks. He wondered how on earth he would be able to explain things when he returned. There was Ellis, the youngest padre, their history professor; at the outbreak of war he had taken to studying Colonel Repington and Mr. Belloc, he talked luminously of salients and exposed flanks. It was all so clear to him, with that large pin-studded map in front of him. It would be no use talking to the Rev. Victor Ellis. Would it be any use talking to any of them? Ellis, who under-

stood everything, to whom all knowledge dovetailed into a neat, decorous mosaic, which 'the Church' defined and welded, would be impatient and contemptuous of his stupidity; Norreys, and Carruthers his Principal, would be christianly sympathetic and would pretend to understand. They would understand nothing. And, for all their conscientious kindliness, they would not be able to help feeling slightly scornful and pitying because Kenrick from all his soul-shaking experiences had brought back concepts of so little intellectual value.

Kenrick saw, in this first forelightening of a lifetime's experience to follow, what had happened to him. He had ceased to be able to argue by abstract terms, he had definitely joined the class who saw all things concretely. This was a class mentally inferior, he knew; but he could not help it. He would never again be able to take a large view of any question or happening that involved human suffering. Economic questions, colour questions, political questions, even religious questions—he would be able to see them only as they lit up human faces with happiness or darkened them with wretchedness and knowledge of weakness and of injustice inflicted. Humanity had become individuals, there was no 'housing problem' or 'working class problem' for him, there was only the vision of lives without loveliness or peace or leisure. It is well for civilisation that there are many minds who rise above such

imperfection, or generalship and the making of alliances and policies, all statesmanship indeed, would be impossible.

For Kenrick, then, if he had ever had any capacity of being with the Napoleons and Repingtons, or with the minds that directed vast armies from Whitehall or from the G.H.Q.'s in Flanders and Germany, that capacity was lost for ever. He was with the humanitarians and sentimentalists, the men who can never judge any question aright because their vision is narrow to the point of falsity, because they can never get behind facts—which are so misleading—to those great general truths of which facts are merely the illustrations, unimportant in themselves.

We have seen that Kenrick's battalion had known a brief wavering. As a lake cannot be vexed without its margins feeling the ebbings of the disturbance, so Kenrick knew of this wavering by the sudden influx of wounded and by the darkening of the faces that came on the stretchers. He was so troubled by distress for his friends, the gallant men with whom he had shared the trenches' boredom and the risks and jests of so many months, the Indians whose patience and endurance he had helped to build up while his own were built up by the constant contemplation of that valour, that he did not think of the quickening of his own danger. That danger had not been slight, as anyone who has run an aid-post during a great battle knows. It was not a slight danger to be the

one fit man amid many maimed, and to have their waves of panic flowing round you. The helpless are at that ebb of vitality in which fears grow swiftly and become querulous and impatient. And the falling back of his battalion meant new casualties among his wounded, since the enemy's barrage followed their recoil; there had been a sudden fierceness and intensity in the showers of over bullets and splinters. He had to think of what to do if the enemy succeeded so far as to press into our own trenches.

It was not until late at night that he knew the full extent of his losses of friends. While waiting in the trenches before going over, Oddam had been killed, Hillyer and Chapman wounded; in the assault and the rest of the day's fighting, Gould, Anderson, Cleminson were killed, and five other officers wounded. A hundred and forty of the Indians were casualties.

Kenrick would have moved his aid-post up when the 171st went over. But Abell had foreadvised him not to move till night.

'Johnny isn't going to go because we shake a bayonet at him. There'll be counter-attacks; we may be pushed back for a time. If we should be shoved back, your wounded will get in our way unless they're a bit back. Stay here; and concentrate on getting them away. If you manage that, then push up to us to-morrow, when things get consolidated and we know what's happening.'

Kenrick did this. It was hard enough, getting his

stretcher cases all into the central collecting station in Tigris Street. As he saw the pulp which high explosive makes of limbs that it strikes, he was glad that John was dead, and by a bullet. He recalled the indignation of his friends—and himself—in China, when the news had first come in that the Germans were using gas. They had not had the earthliest notion of what war was already. Is all our thinking so stringently limited by our senses? Can we imagine nothing but what we have already seen? Are all other things simply names and words to us?

Through the night he worked unceasingly, and by incredible luck got all his wounded away. Just before the first glimmer of dawn he moved across the old No Man's Land with his orderlies, and established a new aid-post. The second day was easier work, with fewer casualties; and his mind was positively light, having learned that Hart was not killed. At night the battalion were relieved, after they had cleared the enemy's rearguard from his old fourth line.

7

On the 24th, while they might, men should have rested. But most of them hunted for souvenirs. The relieving brigades were pursuing the Turk, who just before midnight had been bombing from his fourth line but by dawn was nearly twenty miles away. The battlefield vividly gave the impression of precipitate retreat. There was a large snake half

out of his hole, with a cart-track across his broken back. He had not had time to withdraw before our artillery limbers had made a highroad of the desolation. Everywhere lay those toe-turned-up slippers that the whole world knows as Turkish. It reminded you queerly of the *Arabian Nights*. Abdul, hurrying along in slippered feet, had lost his shoes. Presently the Caliph and his companions would come this way and would find in them evidence against him.

Kenrick was looking at Abdul's old front line. It had been blasted out of shape, was all craters and hummocks. He came upon a row of Turkish corpses sitting stiffly back against what remained of the back wall. They seemed to have been already dead a thousand years, with those ashen cheeks and glazed yet vivid eyes.

A stream of guns and other transport was passing continuously. Floury Baker rode aside, and for a minute looked at the dead. 'It's a good thing for that peculiar thing called British civilisation, padre,' he said, 'that so few of us are going to get out of this land. A couple of years here would turn the whole army into mystics. You simply *can't* take this show as real.'

Kenrick had found Hart, and seen the relief in his eyes. From abundant report he knew that all had gone well with his friend, so far as could be known. There had been a disquieting minor key in most of what Hart had said, when glancing forward to the

renewal of fighting. He had spoken of 'nerves gone wrong'; but Kenrick, any more than anyone else, could not bring himself to believe they were any more wrong than they were bound to be, when a man had been through over two years of Armageddon. The seer of the Apocalypse calculated such events in terms of a time or times or half a time. Flesh and blood had outdured his calculations and made them childish.

The Turkish fourth line was full of dead, and of wounded crying out terribly. These seemed the only souvenirs the enemy had left. Everything else of his small possessions he had taken, with his guns and rifles and ammunition. We had his dead and wounded, and his shattered position, for which we had paid two thousand casualties, including the five hundred thrown away in the attempt of a week earlier. It was a sufficient price, considering that he had fought with a second army extending against his retreat.

After the 171st were relieved, Abell was one of Kenrick's first visitors. He was profuse in praise for the way the wounded had been got away. He urged Kenrick to lie down for a rest, and then laughingly agreed that it was impossible. There were new wounded to evacuate; whether dawn found the Turks still in front of them or gone, there would be little chance of sleep. Forty-five hours broken by nothing more than dozing had already gone by.

Abell apologised for bringing more work, pointing to Jamieson, whose arm was in a sling. 'He wouldn't report before, for fear lest you send him down the line. I insisted on fetching him along. You might see what needs doing.'

While Kenrick by the light of a hurricane unbound the wound and bandaged it with clean stuff, Abell talked of Jamieson's prowess. Kenrick learnt later how much of the rallying of the 171st, when they were driven from their position, had been Abell's work. But now he heard only of Jamieson. Jamieson's skin flushed still darker with pride and delight, and he carried his wounded arm as jauntily as a bird its plumage.

'Our fellows,' he said, 'were simply topping. It makes you proud of the Empire when you realise how it has taught these brown chaps to fight with the bayonet. With British leading they can do anything.'

8

Spiritual things are simply physical on another plane. There is decay and restoration of the mind, as of the body—winter and spring, stripping and leafing of the soul as of the forest. A springtide came now to the army racing forward.

In the world without they found another springtide. Penned in their trenches, or herded beside roads which their wagons pounded into dust or churned into mud, they had forgotten, or rather, had

not seen, that winter had passed. They saw it now. The leap from their trenches had brought them to ankle-deep billowy grass, variegated with flowers of red dead-nettle, cranesbill, ladysmock, shepherd's purse, with reeds and swaying marestails.

Everyone was speaking eagerly to everyone he met, was rejoicing on the victory, on the leaving for ever of those accursed lines, was talking of the new rumours of incredible successes against the demoralised enemy, of the loveliness of grass and flowers again.

McIntyre, the divisional D.A.D.M.S., was riding by the 171st, the day when they left the Sannaiyat position. He turned his horse to the side of Kenrick's, and exchanged greetings.

'They say the Turk's right off the map—has vanished clean into the blue! My word, isn't it topping to see green once more! Have you noticed that there's a very fine erica in flower?'

McIntyre prided himself on being something of a botanist. Kenrick told him the erica was tamarisk. It had been in flower in their old camp before Sannaiyat; but no one had noticed it there, so dusty and draggled was it. Here it thrust up in clean, sweet luxuriance, with rich crimson sprays and tufts.

It would have been a poor enough show, to anyone who had come from the spring meadows of lands that are not desert. But here it was wonderful; even the low mats of dwarf marigold that covered patches that were sheer dust were as much a part of genuine

spring as the Lent lilies of a Cotswold orchard. Presently the hills were perceptibly withdrawing, their snowcaps grew into grey cloudy helmets faintly tipping the dim horizon. The arena itself had expanded. Men were no longer in a cage, no longer blocked by iron walls; they were free in a world of boundless savannas.

The fifteen days' march which ended in the fall of Baghdad was of course 'a historic event'—the first victory of the War which subsequent disaster did not reverse, the first capture of an enemy capital which we did not have to evacuate again. In those far-off days, too, there was an aura of romance about the very name of Baghdad, as about that of no other city, unless it were Lhassa. Now you can make your way there very easily, by steamer to Busra and then train, or across the desert by car from Damascus. But at this time only a few Bloss Lynch men had seen the Tigris even, until the War broke out; and the word Baghdad had been a flame that had lured to destruction the greatest British army ever taken prisoner by a foe. It was wonderful that, while battalion after battalion was being sent into the useless furnace of the Flanders battles, while Russia, Rumania, Italy, were reeling back from terrible defeats, our men in Mesopotamia should be routing their foes and every day seizing guns, prisoners, enormous gains of territory. There was efficiency at last; as the cavalry harassed the Turk

overland, the Navy rushed upstream and blasted his terrified armies to pieces or drove them inland. On the horizon flashed the guns of rearguard battles; but they did not vex the infantry. The explosions came muffled across long intervening stretches of meadow, and were themselves an element in the peace that enwrapped the troops as they moved.

Everyone was physically well. Yet everyone grew very tired. It was 'toujours la marche,' as a Turkish officer taken prisoner after Baghdad observed to Hart. It was 'toujours la marche' for pursuer as well as pursued. Often the marching went on through the night. Sometimes a little rain had fallen, or was still drizzling, enough to make the much-trampled way slippery. Exasperating halts occurred. It was bad to be crawling at two miles an hour in darkness, with your feet wet and miserably cold. But to be suddenly—and often—held up for an hour at a time, a long column of men, was maddening. Lanterns would swing at the side, and voices of enquiry and blasphemy would ring out. 'What the bloody hell are we waiting for now?' 'A cart's overturned.' 'Good Lord! whose cart?' 'That damned padre's bloody cart. He's carrying a piano, or some idiotic thing.' 'He's no business to bring it this way. Why the hell doesn't someone run him in for overloading his cart? What does he want with a cart, anyway? Good Lord! to be held up in the middle of the night by a grand piano!'

Or they would reach their resting-place at three in the morning. It would be drizzling, as like as not. The orders would be to march again at six. You lay down where you were, with a waterproof under you if you had one, without one if you had not; and from sheer weariness you slept, as soon as the ache in your feet let you. You dared not remove your boots, to ease your feet, for you would be hardly asleep before lights were flashing in your face again. It was five o'clock; and all kit must be packed and on the carts by five-thirty.

Yet men pressed forward eagerly. The whole of life had become mortgaged to death. By a supreme effort now, shutting down all powers of protest in mind or body, make the effort that might pay off part of the monstrous debt! You could recover hereafter. But if the Turk were allowed to rally, to throw up defences before Baghdad and make us sit down to trench warfare again, then you would never recover. If you did not leave your bones in the desert, you would go hence with both spirit and body maimed by despair and privation.

Hart's battalion moved close to the river. They went by the positions—half dug but abandoned without fighting—of Nakhailat and Suwada, where the Turk had been expected to exact his further price for Kut, after he had sold us Sannaiyat. They saw the shoals in the Tigris where the *Julnar* had grounded, a year ago, and islands glowing with pink-flushed

tamarisk and with edges lipped by some bright red flower.

9

But of course the mind remembered more than cold and tiredness and grass of paradisal splendour billowing up beneath the wind's caressing fingers and exultation and the discomfort of damp earth and drizzling night and lanterns glowing against your eyes that were red with want of sleep. Incidents starred the grey confusion. It is hard to say why some lingered, while others, more important, vanished.

Kenrick's battalion, marching inland, away from the Tigris, suffered terribly from thirst. In the carelessness of victory, they had been allowed to drain their water-bottles. Towards evening of the first day they halted beside the Nahrwan Canal that Nebuchadnezzar dug. A thousand eyes lit up with the animal gleam of instinct aroused and unendurable, and a hoarse universal murmur came of *pani* (*water*). Yet the Sikhs waited in their ranks, till the order came to fall out. Then the whole battalion rushed to the canal, and into it.

Hart's battalion spent a night near enough to Kut for Hart to be able to visit it. It was a foul, unhappy place, where everyone seemed to have ophthalmia. Obviously a sink of lechery and of lecher's diseases. Its inhabitants appeared to have neither love nor

respect for their deliverers. Perhaps they still remembered how, ten months ago, the Turks had hanged them in batches for having harboured the British. Townshend in his terms of surrender had been unable to make provision for any safety but his own soldiers'.

Simultaneously with Sannaiyat trenches, Lille was taken again. The rumour was so persistent that it was hard to understand why *Reuters* made no mention of so considerable a victory. Floury Baker undertook investigations; he rode over to Hart to report.

'It's dear old Khalil,' he explained. Khalil Pasha was the Turkish commander-in-chief. 'The S. and T. started this beach-rumour. Like all the others. But this one they started accidentally. One of their subalterns was gloating over news from this front, and opined that "poor old Khalil's taken to drink." His sergeant, an exceptionally intelligent man, overheard the "lil's taken" part only, and spread the glad tidings.'

Arabs hung on the skirts of this victorious march, as they had hung on those of disastrous ones a year ago. At the Aziziyeh halt, Kenrick looked up an acquaintance in the Black Watch. He saw a sergeant and several men looking at a heap of evil rags on the floor. 'What do you think of this gentleman, sir?' asked the sergeant. Kenrick saw nothing but rags. He looked closer, and saw eyes blazing with a beast's hatred and terror, from the Arab huddled on

the ground. The sergeant showed a murderous knobkerry. 'We found this gentleman lurrrking with this, in a ditch along our route.'

Next day, the 171st passed by the Loamshires, and he recognised Fletcher walking with that remnant. Fletcher was so footsore that he walked as if he were trying to get a laugh from a low-class music-hall gallery. He was too tired to do more than exchange greetings. They were toiling over a sandy Sahara, bone-strewn with what had been Townshend's horses a year ago.

10

Fletcher's feet became so smashed that he had to fall back, and march with the second line. This gave him a day's rest, till they came up. He joined himself to Captain D. A. M. Newall, who had been A.P.M. of the Hyderabad Division; he was now in charge of the rearguard. Newall rejoiced in his menacing initials, and in his A.P.M. days loved to sign some ferocious order with them. They came dramatically at the end, like an expression of the reader's annoyance, D. A. M. N.

Several Loamshires with the second column fell back, exhausted. One was riding, or, rather, being carried by, Fletcher's horse, which Fletcher refused to use himself on the march. Another asked for a lift in the empty bullock-carts belonging to a field hospital. The major, a member of the Indian Medical

Service, rudely turned him away. It wasn't his 'job to provide joy-rides for the infantry.' Fletcher pointed out that the man was dead beat, and could not go a step further. There were Arabs, a mosquito cloud just out of easy rifle range. 'No business of mine. His battalion should have got him hardened before he left Sannaiyat. What were they doing all the summer?' Fletcher lost control of himself so far as to retort, 'Some people don't seem to need hardening. I suppose natural want of decent sympathy or imagination does it.'

The major ruffled up like a turkey-cock. But he said nothing. Fletcher, though only a captain, was a padre; and on the cause of their quarrel he would have support from the infantry. But the major now saw it as a matter affecting his prestige as a field officer, to see that the infantry should be left to die by slow torture under Arab knives, before they got lifts in *his* carts.

To his indignation, he saw Fletcher speaking earnestly to a subaltern of a Sikh regiment. The subaltern rode up to the O.C. of the line of march, the colonel of an Indian battalion. The column was halted, and the subaltern rode back and saluted. 'Colonel Hawker's compliments to Major Shand. The column halts until those men who have fallen out are taken up into the ambulances.' The exhausted Loamshire and a comrade, who were already twenty yards behind the column, sitting despairing

on the desert, were brought in. Fletcher had made an enemy.

It may have been this brief unauthorised halt that misled a particularly fine bullock who was pulling an empty cart, one of the last in the column. Shortly after the restart, although the hourly ten minutes' halt had taken place hardly five minutes ago, he tucked his legs under him, knee under fat, comfortable belly, and sat down. He was abused, exhorted, cursed in more than one language, struck, kicked, but declined to stir. He stayed with serene, indifferent expression, his head uplifted as his jaws moved peacefully. Meanwhile the column was slowly but regularly withdrawing, the Arabs were coming closer and could be seen behind knolls of sand.

Fletcher expressed admiration for the bullock's brave gesture of independence. 'He is standing—or sitting, rather—for the rights of small nations. He won't be bullied. I have every sympathy with him.'

'I have no sympathy *whatever* with the bullock,' said the ex-A.P.M. sternly, with slow deliberate stress on each word. 'He is fed and paid to do this work.'

They gave the protestant up; and waited. At length, when the situation was getting anxious indeed, as leisuredly as he had tucked his knees under him the bullock unfolded them, and resumed his work. He had established a principle.

II

After the bonefield came a marvellous wood of willows, with catkins—a dancing piece of English spring. And then, they caught their breath as—over the desert, unbelievable as the first glimpse of Memnon and his brother statue, gazing from their immemorial thrones across the sands and seen by the traveller setting out at dawn from Luxor—rose the Arch of Ctesiphon. Here the desert glamour drew to a focus. Parthian dynasties had reigned here, Roman emperors had been slaves and captives. Julian had crossed the stream, and stormed the city of which this mighty mud wall was the only visible relic. Townshend had won his disastrous 'victory' in its shadow; let it be remembered to the praise of the English that their guns had not been ranged on it, however it may have served as an enemy observation post.

For a whole day, from the time when the first gold of morning shone through it and around it, till the time when dusk was filling its emptiness, the Arch loomed before Kenrick's eyes. Once you saw it, you could not take your eyes off it; you marched upon it with your being rapt. They spent the night near it, on the slopes of the huge earthworks of millenniums ago. Abell dug into a barrow, and found a stone coffin, enclosing the skeleton of a child. The bones crumbled to dust in the air.

12

There had been a two days' halt at Aziziyeh, below Ctesiphon. The army fumed. Those damned civilians at home! What was the matter with the War Cabinet, to hold them now, while the Turk re-formed? Baghdad was practically in our hands!

Then the tide of men was released again, and flowed onward. The enemy stiffened in defence, there was bitter fighting on the Diyala, that ran like a protecting arm before the city. The Hyderabad Division saw boats come floating down Tigris from its tributary, manned with dead men. The Lancashires had launched them; their crews had instantaneously exchanged the plashing of earthly oars for the muffled beat of Charon's.

So we crossed the Tigris lower down, and the Hyderabad Division and the cavalry together struck for the other bank of the city. The *djinns* mobilised against us, and through two days a dust-storm blew unceasingly. It swept against our parched throats and blinded eyes. Under its cover the enemy flung shells on our ranks, and slipped away casualtyless himself.

Our friends occupied the period variously. Floury Baker fired into a birdless mirage and enormous skirts of shifting sand, through which at intervals shone a huge iron bridge that skimmed a waterless nulla. Being a wise man, he did not claim to have

damaged foe or helped friend. Corps Intelligence Department, assessing for publication the enemy's doubtless huge losses, got no assistance from his laconic estimate. 'Enemy casualties probably nil.' A rebuke was rapped back. 'It has been noticed that this officer, though known to be zealous in attention to his duty, is inclined to indulge in ill-timed frivolity, particularly when acknowledging communications from his superior officers.' Hart's men were engaged eight miles from the river, in what was officially called a wide turning movement, to find the enemy's right flank. All they did find was what proved to be an excellent target for the enemy's gunners. They endured two days and nights on one water-bottle per man. The choking sand, the frantic thirst, the helpless experience of being shelled where there was no cover, made the time an ecstasy of wretchedness. Kenrick's battalion fared hardly better. Late in the first day of the fighting they were pushed up against what was presumed to be the Turk's centre. They were famished from lack of water and saw no sort of objective, and the earth was a swirling dust-spout round them. Just when they might have found the enemy, the cavalry broke off the action and swept majestically across their front, from before Hart's brigade, right to the river, having decided to spend the rest of daylight watering their horses. Their disappearance from the battle lifted enormous tension from the enemy, who had begun to

fear that for once he was going to be outflanked and cut off; it also drew a concentrated fire from both banks, of which the infantry got the benefit. The Hyderabad Division's G.O.C. had to change his headquarters five times, being shelled from place to place. Three days later, he and the cavalry general accidentally met in a very public place in Baghdad. The interview was a memorable one; and it was some salve to the feelings of the infantry when the numerous ear-witnesses' accounts reached them. Fletcher, still with the second line, was at bridgehead when the first wounded came in, and saw a cycle of confusion and of tragi-comic incidents. A blundering ass of an English subaltern, when the Indian wounded began to arrive, generalised from two instances. 'Do you see how all these bloody niggers are shot in their left hands?' The remark reached the ears of the major of an Indian battalion, and for some time he hunted for the speaker with a loaded revolver, out of his mind with fury. 'I'll teach these damned ribbon-sellers to keep on calling our chaps niggers, and to say that our wounds are self-inflicted!' Fletcher saw him, and deliberately misdirected him; he also gave the offender timely warning to keep his mouth shut and his person hidden.

There were Loamshires among the wounded, some of them Fletcher's friends. Rumours of the Turk using explosive bullets were brought by them; and Sedgebeer, who had recovered from his Abdul Hassan

Mounds wound and was back, with the second line, made a happy comment. 'From all I can 'ear, sir, these 'ere Arab bullets seem to me out of all real 'umanity.'

'Very witty,' said Floury Baker, when the remark reached him, through Kenrick. 'I like the cautious and qualified way in which the judgment was given. When you think what war is, *at its best*—blowing flesh and life asunder, and disembowelling and blinding—it says a lot for the speaker's broadmindedness that he drew the line so tentatively. I'd give a prize to anyone who could cram more qualifications into one statement.'

Another Loamshire, new to war and never yet in action, reported to Fletcher a rumour that appeared to shock and surprise him. 'They say as 'ow the Turk is using this same 'ere 'igh explosive, *like we do*.'

Fletcher, though a Baptist minister, was developing a kind of humour, dry like everything else in these latitudes. 'Our Government ought to report his conduct to the Geneva Convention,' he said. 'Asiatics have no right to use anything but bows and arrows, or an occasional musket.'

'That's what I think,' said Captain Newall, who was standing by. 'I've never been able to rid myself of the feeling that this whole Turco war is something that ought never to have been allowed to develop. It ought to have been treated as a police affair at the outset, and nipped before it grew serious. It's

absurd, to have the whole British Empire being stood up to by the Sick Man of Europe.'

13

Fletcher was gazing philosophically at the crowd which congested the bridge of boats. It seemed to him that a thousand men were all swearing at once. Mules were swearing also—squealing and kicking and bouncing with rage. He did not notice a tall officer ride up to him.

'Whose transport is this?' asked the newcomer, in a voice tense with passion.

Fletcher started. 'The Hyderabad Division's,' he said, surprised—too surprised to add 'sir.'

The officer rode furiously up to the bridge, 'and was about to curse them all to hell.' He thought better of it, and rode furiously away again. Fletcher saw that it was the Corps Commander, too exasperated to trust himself to speak.

And now, when at last they entered Baghdad, there was no excitement, no feeling of romance or wonder—only tiredness and a longing for rest and some sanity in the way of life. The brigades that had been through the march and fighting of two days rested where they had arrived, by the Turkish gunpits and trenches. Another brigade went through them, the Black Watch leading.

Very early in the morning of March 11th, the wealthiest European neutral resident in Baghdad,

listening tensely for what would break the silence that had followed on the long cannonading, heard thunderous bangs on his door. He rushed down, since no servant dared go, and saw 'two men in women's clothes.' To the foreigner these Black Watch privates spoke, sternly but simply, using a foreign language in order that he might understand.

'*Dekho! cha lao!*' ('Look! bring tea!')

In that manner did he learn that the British Empire had taken Baghdad.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

THERE is no city to which man has added so little by the work of his hands as he has to Baghdad. The work of his hands here is despicable; bazaars built over into stinking catacombs, a few square buildings of barrack-like beauty abutting on the river, mud walls, acres of tombs with here and there a blue glazed dome. Everywhere decay, apathy, absence of imagination or humanity.

Nor were the people any lovelier than their deeds.

But the gardens were glorious. Straight from the desert the conquerors moved into a paradise of flowering peach and apricot, into great groves of date-palm; they encamped in luxuriant wheat, their horses were stabled in deep pasture. Leverets, pheasants, partridges rose from their steps.

Floury Baker was with Hart, a mile outside the city. They were looking at the 171st, encamped in onion-fields. The Indians looked happy at last. With great satisfaction they were busy cooking;

some were rooting up the onions, others were tearing the beams out of the late owner's shed, for fuel.

'I am no agricultural expert, Hart,' Floury said. 'But I *think* the Arabs' onion crop is going to be a failure this year.'

Just then a G.H.Q. staff colonel riding by noted the destruction going on. He summoned a stray subaltern to him. 'Those men,' he said pompously, 'are looting. General Maude has expressly forbidden all looting. General Maude thinks—and I entirely agree with him—that it is of the first importance that we should conciliate the populations whom we are fighting to liberate. That looting must be stopped at once.'

'Very good, sir,' said the subaltern. 'Where shall I tell the men to go?'

'They are to go elsewhere,' said the colonel, helpfully. 'Damn it, sir, it is not my business to find a camp for them. I have other work.'

The subaltern saluted, and withdrew. He came up to Hart and Baker, saluted, and said, 'That colonel, sir, has pointed out to me that these men are looting. He has drawn my attention to General Maude's proclamation against looting, and expresses the opinion that it is of the first importance to conciliate the populations that we are fighting to liberate. And I think, sir,' he added to Hart, who knew him, 'that the looters are *your* men.'

Hart and Baker looked with distaste after the trim

figure of the G.H.Q. colonel, as he rode on his way. Then Floury spoke.

'Where are these looters?' he shouted. He shut his eyes hard, and stared in their direction. 'I—do—not—see—them. Let them damn well loot every blinking thing they choose.'

Hart laughed. 'All the same, I'm sorry for the Buddoo. He doesn't particularly want either us or Johnny Turk here, and we just scrap up and down the fields he wants to cultivate. He's a sub-human sort of Caliban. But he has a case.'

'We are fighting to liberate him from tyrants,' said Floury.

'Unfortunately, he regards us as vermin, and he cuts our throats when he gets a chance.'

'I see his side,' Floury conceded. 'But I'm damned if I'm going to bother about the lesser points of ethics now, especially with men who've been dead beat for weeks. Not if a thousand comfortable pups from G.H.Q. come talking to me! *He* gets his onions right enough, without even having to pull them up. If he didn't, we should all be sent out on fatigues to fetch them. And his come by looting as much as those that your fellows are taking. Now, are you going to tell them to stop, and to clear off to some nice deserty place where there isn't a blade to be looted?'

Hart shook his head.

2

There were only two days of peace in Baghdad. On the 13th, the weary troops were dragged from their green bivouacs and sent fourteen miles forward, to Mushaidiyeh, a fortress-station on the railway line. The Turkish position was six miles away from the river, a nest of nullas and irrigation cuts. It was stormed in clear afternoon light of a scorching day. The 171st had the job of carrying a high mound which dominated the left of the battlefield. They took it before their scheduled time, and our own guns shelled them off it again. Among their killed was Lieutenant Ronald Jamieson.

'He'd been strongly recommended for an immediate M.C. for Sannaiyat,' Abell told Kenrick. 'It won't go through now, of course, and his people won't have that satisfaction. I'm sorrier than I can say. I was keen on his getting it, for I have an idea they're in a pretty poor way, somewhere in India. It would have meant more to them than to most.'

Mushaidiyeh cost fifteen hundred casualties. The action was of no particular importance. No historian will ever bother to mention it.

3

The victors left a guard in Mushaidiyeh station, and fell back to the belt of green covering Baghdad. Maude, having liberated that city, proceeded to give

it a civilised administration. He issued a proclamation, announcing to the people their emancipation from Turkish misrule, and set up a huge gallows in a prominent square. The gallows gave great satisfaction to the Jews; anticipating that vengeance on their late oppressors would go on all day long, they came in parties before dawn and picnicked in its shadow. It was natural that they should gloat in the sight of others suffering, after all they had endured. It was equally natural that crowds of their liberators, who could not hope to see such sights in their own land, should come whenever an Arab who had been caught with a weapon was hanged for the offence.

The proclamation was a very fine document. It had been drawn up by a skilled and subtle politician, a man who had made himself an authority on the psychology of Oriental races. It contained a great deal about 'the noble Arabs.' In Hejaz, they were told, Sherif Hussain was now King,

> 'and his Lordship rules in independence and freedom, and is the Ally of the Nations who are fighting against the power of Turkey and Germany; so, indeed, are the noble Arabs, the Lords of Koweit, Nejd and Asir.
>
> Many noble Arabs have perished in the cause of Arab freedom at the hands of those alien rulers, the Turks, who oppressed them. It is the determination of the Government of Great Britain and the Great Powers allied to Great Britain, that these noble Arabs shall not have suffered in vain.'

'Who are these noble Arabs?' asked Kenrick. He was studying the proclamation as it lay on a side-table in the mess.

'It's officialese for *beastly Buddoos*,' explained Edmund Candler, the writer, who was 'Eye-Witness' with the Mesopotamian armies. He had been brought in to lunch by Abell. 'The chap who drew up that proc. ought to be kept safe till the War ends, and then ceded to the Irish as a peace-offering. If the Blarney Stone ever loses its power, he could kiss it; that would put new virtue into it.'

'I see Maude's doing everything in style,' said Wilson, the adjutant, who had come in with a fresh notice. 'Officers who desire it can be cremated now. None of your vulgar planting of a man when he pops off. Only—they must provide their own wood, as there isn't enough in rations.'

He put the notice on the table.

4

It is well known to soldiers that a city newly taken from an enemy needs a vigorous administration. Kenrick came upon other evidences of justice, besides the gallows. He was in Baghdad with Abell, when they heard cries; and as they came out of a date-grove they saw an Indian tied between poles. A British sergeant was flogging him, with slow, long pauses between strokes, as he drew his arm far back. The man's naked back was bleeding. A line of other

culprits were standing by, waiting their turn; some, having been flogged, were moaning and writhing on the ground.

'Indian followers,' said Abell. 'Been gambling, probably.'

'Good Heavens! why, every mess does that!'

'Yes. But *we* can afford it. The theory is, if these chaps do it they'll be tempted to thieve. So we insist on a higher moral standard for them. It's really precautionary discipline. That is,' said Abell, exploding, 'it's bloody humbug.'

About the same time, to stiffen the soldierly quality of men who had endured three months of desperate battle and hard marching, several Indians were shot for desertion and a British private of nineteen for cowardice. The latter execution was never forgiven by his comrades, the men of a very famous regiment. Kenrick dined with their officers when the memory was still raw; he gathered what was felt, from the undertone beneath the few quiet words that were spoken.

Fletcher came closest to this beastliest cruelty of war. He lay reading before his tent, in the late afternoon, feeling exquisitely lazy and peaceful. The Loamshires were encamped some miles beyond the city, where the sands began again; but there was abundant green within the horizon, and the illimitable desert, stretching from here to the Mediterranean's far waters, was a thing that made you feel part of

eternity. Then he noticed an Indian battalion being paraded near by. Their colonel was speaking to them hurriedly; Fletcher could see he was trying to make his voice very solemn and impressive, and to load it with a deeper horror than he felt. A sepoy not in war-kit stood beside him, guarded.

Two hours later, after Fletcher's mess had lain down on the sand for dinner, Chapman came in. He was excited, and spoke in tones even more high-pitched and querulous than his usual ones, his manner showing that he was on the edge of slight hysteria.

'I say, you chaps, I've got a queer job. Guess what it is.'

No one guessed; and Chapman was anxious to get it out.

'I've got to shoot a nigger,' he shrilled.

Next morning, Fletcher, having stretched himself, was thinking of getting up, when two Loamshire privates went by his tent. One recognised a pal, and shouted to him. He slapped his rifle, and said, 'Best bit of shooting we've had this year.'

5

Hart learnt Fletcher's address from Kenrick, and asked him to lunch in what had formerly been the Khalil Pasha Hotel, but was now the Hotel Maude. He asked (as well as Kenrick) Floury Baker and Abell and Father O'Donnell. Each of these men was

unknown to at least one of the others. But Hart and Kenrick pooled friends ; it was as well to do so while you had the chance.

After lunch they sat on a balcony overlooking the river, smoking and drinking coffee. Hart began to chaff Fletcher. He had been surprised to find how glad he was to see the queer little unmilitary figure again. He was 'intrigued' by the change that had come over the talkative, combative modernist whom he had known on the P boat, scarcely six months ago. Then Fletcher had been sure that everything could be settled by logic. Argument was the master, if you could only persuade men to listen. 'Now ? He was quiet, and had distress and perplexity in his eyes.

Hart guessed that there had been unpleasant experiences, rudeness, insolence, things that hurt self-esteem. But this new silence was not the silence of mortification, there was in it a humility that made the grave little fellow more lovable than formerly. He drew instinctive respect, now, from men whose respect was worth having. Both Abell and Floury knew a man when they met one, and the latter wasted very little time or even courtesy, as a rule, on anyone he considered pretentious or empty. They had both accepted Fletcher—whose khaki still bulged incongruously, and whose Sam Browne was still rusty and badly polished—accepted him at once.

Hart chaffed Fletcher. 'Worrying because we shall be moving on from Baghdad, padre ? Thinking

of the charms of the Circassian ladies?' There is not a wide range of variety in chaff.

The Baghdad bazaars, it should be explained, seemed empty of things to buy, except women. The noble Arabs possessed more prostitutes to the square mile than you could find anywhere else, unless in Jerusalem. Plump little women harassed you at every step. It was said that one—a rather stately queen of her kind—had mysteriously reached Maude's private office, and announced her ambitions. 'I Khalil Basha friend. I go to him for fifty rubee. Now you chief man. I go to you for forty rubee. Because British kind friend boor beoble.'

Fletcher laughed, and said, 'Yes, it will be a wrench, Colonel.'

He was silent, and his face clouded. Hart looked at him narrowly. He left him alone for five minutes, then rallied him again. This time, Fletcher responded. He told them of the scene last evening, and of the words he had overheard that morning.

None of them spoke. Each one had mind enough to visualise what had taken place; the experience to which the court-martial's death-sentence came almost as mercy—the wretched last parade, the colonel's attempt to persuade himself to moral indignation against what he well knew to be the despair and fright of a slave weary of a misery he had never even dimly guessed at when he was first persuaded into taking part in a war that was

no concern of his. The shooting party sleeping in the guard-tent a few yards away from their prisoner. The dazed wretch dragged out just as the wonderful life that throbs in the world was beginning to touch all things with colour and beauty. The officer emptying his revolver into the convulsive body, kicking in its death-throes.

Fortunately, a great deal of this terrible cruelty can be concealed from most men's knowledge, by being made a part of routine and machinery. A named regiment can be 'detailed' to 'carry out the sentence of the court'; Second-Lieutenant Blank can be 'detailed' to 'take charge of the execution of the sentence.' The whole affair can be notified afterwards in *Orders*, so impersonally worded that it will seem like the touching of a button which causes an electric tool to start its work and to cease when the button is touched again.

Kenrick was the first to speak. 'Is it necessary?' he asked.

'No,' said Abell.

'Yes,' said Hart, slowly, 'with mercenaries. Unless you're going to take more trouble to see that none of them come unless they *know*—really *know*—the utter hell of physical torture that war is. So long as they are—many of them——'

'Most of them,' said Abell.

'Many of them—' Hart repeated, stiffly, 'harassed into service by headmen who are afraid of the sahebs

when they come on tour and want to know why *their* villages are so "disloyal"—harassed more remotely by officials who want ribbons and k's——'

'Or driven in by hunger,' said Abell, 'or cajoled by nonsense about glory. After all, you've the same recruiting posters in England. In peace time, too. How *can* you tell the truth? You'd never get anyone but criminals and lunatics, if you did.'

'*Mostly* lunatics,' said Father O'Donnell.

'So long,' said Hart, returning to his unfinished thesis, 'it will be necessary. But with free men it isn't necessary, and never was necessary.'

'Either way it's damnable,' said Abell.

'How are you going to get rid of it?' asked Kenrick.

'You aren't going to get rid of it,' said Hart. 'There'll always be enough people on top who have neither the experience nor the imagination to get an earthly glimmer of what the business is, to support it against all proposal of change. Long after everyone else knows what devilry it is, the brass hats and M.P.'s will talk of "necessity for discipline" and will say how the N.C.O.'s and even the rank and file would miss these executions at dawn, if you stopped them.'

'It's our public-school system,' said Floury, who had theories on all problems. 'The system of automatic discipline—whenever possible, physical. You do a thing; you get swished. You may have

had to do it, conceivably there was no other way of saving the State from destruction or the school from being gutted—you do it because you could not help doing it. All that might be freely admitted. But . . . the rule has been *broken*, and for breaking it a swishing is provided, to follow automatically. You may be a beefy brute whose father's in munitions, without a nerve under your hide; or you may be a poet or a dreamer or a half-wit or a chap who sees devils when a leaf flutters—you'll be swished, all the same. Then we carry the system into the Army, and apply it to every sort of chap and every sort of nation and in every sort of contingency. Well, the whole Empire has been swept into the War, so everyone has a chance of tasting the public school system in all its merits.'

Hart was amused at Floury's vehemence. He knew how instantaneously his friend's mind reasoned when it got to work on a problem, and he guessed that until this conversation Floury had never known what he thought on this subject. It was probably a question that had never come his way. It had come the way of Hart and Abell, only too often.

'I didn't know Floury had such strong objections to swishing,' said Abell, laughing.

'Nor did I—till now,' said Floury. 'Oh, I've no sort of objection to it—it's a sight better than keeping fellows in, or giving them lines to do. But I guess my objection is to leaving it to chaps

without brains or nerves. It's *too* damn silly, the way we try to make everything a bit of machinery. That's why, when a man makes an unholy mess of a show, there's such an outcry against sacking him or holding him responsible. You *must* uphold the man at the wheel, *whatever* he does. You'll destroy the confidence of our fine services if you won't give every fool *carte blanche*. You see, we get the feeling that the business is all routine and sketched out in advance, and that it isn't *fair* to demand brains, any more than you demand them in a machine, once it starts going.'

'But where did you pick up this enthusiasm for board schools?' asked Abell.

'I'm damned glad I never went to one,' said Floury. 'But Mespot hasn't been a bad supplementary to my public school. It's teaching me a heap of things.'

'May we know some of them?'

'Well, for one thing, it's set my mind at rest about a problem that used to worry me. I always wondered where on earth all the fellows who stuck in the lower fourth and left there got to in after life, and what the devil they found to do. I know now. They all become generals.'

As everyone laughed, he continued. 'Our C.R.A. took me with him, when they were drawing up plans at divisional headquarters for one of our brilliant shows last spring. I was doing temporary brigade major. The dear old boy who was the

nominal head of the whole show just wandered in and out of the tent restlessly, the whole time. The rest of us ignored him, and got on with work. He would suddenly pop up with some damnfool question. "What about a spot of tea just then?" Or, "Do you think we shall have enough guns?"'

'But,' Floury pointed out, 'we shouldn't be in Baghdad now, if Maude weren't the methodical public school system incarnate, *at its best*, with science superadded. He knows every last rule, and he works by rigid system. In *everything*. And war by machinery needs the perfect human machine to work it properly. You've got war by machinery now. The net result, *for us*, at any rate, has been a deal less suffering than we had a year ago, when you had flesh and blood, functioning with damned inferior brains, trying to run machinery. *De minimis non curat machina.*'

'Stow it, Floury,' said Hart. 'You're not the only one who still knows his Latin tags.'

6

Abell and Baker had excused themselves, and gone. The others sat on. Afternoon gilded the flowing river; it was too hard to tear yourself away, when this was your few days' oasis in a year of desert sojourning. You would be so soon gone again.

Another Despatch had been published. Hart was now D.S.O. It gave him less satisfaction than he

would have thought, a year ago. There was so much heart-burning over these miserable ribbons.

As if reading his thought, Kenrick asked, 'Why hasn't Floury Baker got anything in this last Despatch of Maude's?'

'He's a bad soldier,' said Hart, with a wry twist of his face.

'Who considers him that?'

'*Not* the infantry. We'd rather have Floury behind us than any other gunner on this front. When it comes to shooting, there isn't a gunner to touch him. Even the folk on top know that. But his harness isn't as spotless or his brass as shiny as might be. That *makes* him a bad soldier. Ignoramus! Answer me! When do you see the Higher Command drifting round the trenches and gun-positions? When there's a show on?'

Kenrick gave the correct answer.

'Quite right. Well, then, they don't see our friend Floury in action, do they? No, they see him in semi-parade conditions. And it's most important for certain people that war should remain spectacular and highly ornamental. So the D.S.O.'s go to gunners like that Montmorency fellow, who last spring shelled my chaps out of Mason's Mounds, a good fifteen minutes after they'd taken them. He never gave a scrap of help when they were attacking—he was firing a thousand yards beyond, into the blue. But he shortened his range as soon as they'd

got phone lines down and had sent back the message that they were in; he crumped them out of the position and half out of existence. So they gave him the D.S.O. and a brevet, and he's on show whenever brass hats come round. At those times, they keep Floury, as a rule, on the ammunition train, way back. But they're careful to fetch him up to command a battery again damned quick, when there's a show on. They're fools; but not such fools as to do without the best gunner in the division where shooting's concerned.'

'Isn't the important thing the shooting?' asked Fletcher.

'You're as ignorant as Floury himself.' Hart smiled, as he explained. 'That's what *he* says; and he says there isn't enough time both to get the men's shooting good *and* to have every button and strap shiny. So he concentrates on the shooting and lets the polishing go, being a merciful man who cares for the lives of the infantry. That's how he's got known on top as a bad soldier. But they'll have a job next time to pass him over. Even what the foot-slogger thinks permeates in time—and God knows we've had time enough, in this infernal waste of years out here—to the head-pieces of our Olympians.'

'My chief has just got a D.S.O.,' said Fletcher, smiling. 'He spent the last ten months in Amara, listing in a ledger the names of everyone who has died in these shows or in hospital. I found him in his

shirt-sleeves, just before Christmas, very exhausted as he got to his four thousandth name. He used to do about a dozen names a morning, I was told.'

'He ought to have enough names over for a C.B. as well,' said Hart. 'I might have helped him get his D.S.O.,' he added grimly. 'I nearly did. But don't talk of ribbons again.' He lifted his hand wearily, as though he would push aside the whole scheme of things. 'If you padres know any word that'll make the business anything but a waste of time and drain of spirit, for God's sake say it, before some of us go mad! Our lives are flowing away like that river there—and we have the sense to *know* that they're flowing away, we carry with us some sort of mirror that shows us the futile things we are. I'm getting afraid to like a fellow I meet. Every man I cared a straw about has gone west. Why do we bother to carry on? What's the use of the civilisation we say we're fighting to save?'

He was silent, gazing at the stream rippling past and gathering on its broad back the quiet, rich evening. Then he rose, and, though he was host, with a few stumbling words he excused himself.

7

The conversation left them all troubled, in their different ways. Abell, the good fellow, to whom kindness and courtesy and consideration for others came as naturally as leaves to the tree and who

without them could hardly have breathed, saw the hard cruelty of the military system simply as suffering. He could not have argued it on lines of whether it was necessary or not, he was not interested in the question of whether it was just or not. He knew only that to some it brought the most intense misery that can be conceived, and that others it hardened. Floury Baker saw another example of the stupidity and lack of imagination which were wasting the lavish valour of the English and their good-heartedness and sense of fairness. Their leaders simply could not conceive of any life other than their own, or of any weakness that did not fall to men who had walked in their own orthodox ways. He had never before worried about the particular thing that they had been discussing now. He still thought that it might in extreme cases be a necessary weapon, to be held in reserve. But it was being applied by rule, to save people from the responsibility of thinking; and he felt the embitterment of men's minds, the greater because under the iron pressure of their position they dared not express it. Fletcher dimly saw it as something that did not square with that scheme of things essentially good though in accidents and non-essentials in need of improvement, which he had persuaded himself to believe and teach. He *must* believe and teach this; it was the bread of life to him. One might have said, it was the wine of life, except that in his life was no wine. Life had

fitted into his creed, only because his people had narrowed and curtailed it. They had been compelled to do this, because they were submerged in the national life and of no importance to their rulers, except in a few of their prejudices—these needed humouring, simply because the people they gripped were so many and had considerable voting strength. His people had simplified life for themselves—and for those who made use of them—by means of these prejudices. Thus, gambling and horse-racing were great sins, and moderate drinking was 'a thing no Christian could countenance.' But things out of sight, such as the suffering of animals or subject races, or the fact that multitudes of men and women, although not lacking necessary clothes and food, went to their graves without leisure or imagination or happiness—these things did not matter. They were deplorable, no doubt; but you did not see them, so were free to assume that those who spoke of them grossly exaggerated them. The official telling of lies, the forcing of miswritings of their history on conquered races, the handing over of nine-tenths of our journalism to ignoramuses or to people frankly cynical and willing to pretend to believe in literary and moral values so long as the pretence brings them in a good time—these things no more troubled their pulpits and platforms than lynching disturbs an evangelical preacher in Georgia. Fletcher's people went through life in a shadow that, though it con-

tained no exhilaration, contained a fair amount of comfort. Their joys and prizes were paltry; but then, so were most of their pains and disappointments.

Hart and Kenrick and O'Donnell were troubled in deeper fashion. O'Donnell found himself, as he listened to Fletcher's narrative, hating the English, though nearly all the English he knew were good fellows, and as guiltless in this matter as himself. He knew there was a surging bitterness in the Irish troops because of voices which had found them past all censorship; every mail was a carrier of 'sedition.' Those executed in Ireland were not names, but memory and friendship. News which was not in the English papers excited their distant countrymen. These men were not unwilling to fight for the Empire; but it was maddening to hear of their own people in revolt and so the news came to them 'fighting for freedom.' He remembered the Easter Rising in Dublin a year ago. He had been one of countless thousands who were wildly dismayed and angered by the work of Pearse and Connolly. But before the executions had finished they were all one in their rage against the English. He had mentioned this once to Fletcher, who had been sympathetic but had asked, 'There were only about sixteen executions, weren't there?' Would the English never understand why other races hated them? Only about sixteen executions; but they took place slowly and in small batches, methodically, two now, two again several days later. The

cold, exasperating 'justice' of the schoolmaster, who can be as cruel in cold blood as in hot, as savage from a sense of duty and for the sake of 'discipline' as from white-heat rage! 'You idiot!' he told Fletcher. 'Don't you see what your precious military mind did? You got hold of what was a dirty slummy row, that had ruined half Dublin and our fair name as a people and taken hundreds of decent lives, and you gave it dignity. You made silly murder and suicide into a martyrdom that Ireland'll never forget.'

Kenrick's mind turned back to that almost incredibly far-off day last August, when he had been drifting up the river-haze in a dream, and had heard men talking of Casement's hanging next day. Organised justice, he saw, moved so impersonally that you could not blame it as you could a man. It drove you almost out of your wits if you thought of it, it was so inexorable. Praying to it was like praying to cancer or a sea-storm; what it set out to do it did, and there was an end of it. Casement's execution might have been just, might at the time have been 'necessary,' as the military mind and legal mind count necessity. But Kenrick knew that in ten years' time it would look unspeakably ignoble, a stain on the fair magnanimity of England's war. Yet who could have foreseen this then? And how could we have done otherwise? He told Hart of his feeling. Hart thought that Casement died de-

servedly, and that such multitudes of better men had died that it was squeamish to vex oneself about a man who was trying to bring the war into Ireland. But he added a comment that made his friend feel how childish human actions are, even when grimmest. 'We probably shouldn't have hanged him if it hadn't been for those protests pouring in from Yankee bishops and pacifists. Why should they go on butting into our affairs, while they stand aloof and treat the whole War as if it were matter for a debating society?'

But Hart saw that, once you flung men into these unnatural relations with one another and with the world, you could no more prevent events marching from one cruelty to another—with endless repercussion when the whole was over—than you could help the day moving to sunset. He had had to kill the Turkish wounded at Sannaiyat, as they would have had to kill him under similar circumstances. If a British regiment broke under fire, or a British private cheated a sepoy of his rations wood, the sepoys despised the British and sleeping resentments rose in their minds, resentments whose hidden presence had been unsuspected. If an Indian regiment panicked, then the term 'nigger'—which might be so harmless, a mere robustious playfulness; did not the whole outside world for a sailor consist of Dutchmen, Dagoes, Chinks, and Niggers? Are not we ourselves, in some parts of the world, 'foreign

devils, Feringhis, Percys ' ?—took on a bitter connotation, and a ' nigger ' could be shot at dawn without any stirring of pity for the fact that he was a fellow-soldier who had failed, as you might have failed, and with more excuse. Or were the words that Fletcher overheard simply the defence thrown up by semi-hysteria—a jesting word spoken, to gain time for the spirit to heal after a wound received ?

8

The War rapidly grew more teasingly trivial. There had been a dignity in trying to burst through Sannaiyat—after we had thrice recoiled from those terrible lines it had become a trial of endurance between Briton and Turk to smash or hold them. There had been a splendour in the name and thought of Baghdad ; we had been walking in the glow of mighty memories and deeds, and a kingdom had fallen, even in the universal clang of the world war resoundingly. But now we were fighting for nameless stretches of sand and pebbles, for the foul middens which marked where petty villages had once existed, for dry ditches that watered no fields. Over useless dust men had to walk on, and on, and on, from one indistinguishable line of earth-scar to the next, while they were torn to pieces or shot down. There was no reason why the process should ever cease, so long as there were five Turks able to hold a rifle or fire a machine-gun. The hopelessness and uselessness

of their task took hold on men. They had been eager, they became resigned. There was little to choose on the score of fatalism between British and Indian.

The first week of April was one of trying march inland and of bivouac away from the river. It was a pestilential experience; dry grass-spears pierced the crevices of their boots and irritated the skin into sores, insects made sleep at night impossible. The moon, growing to fullness, was maddeningly beautiful, shining on the desert pampas and the land's wizened face. Hart's battalion rested on the eighth by a village irrigated by a canal flowing swiftly like a brook, and thickly shadowed with fruit-trees. The green, knee-deep wheat was very pleasant. Xenophon's ten thousand came to this village, in the year 399 B.C.; the *Anabasis* speaks gratefully of its shade and comfort.

Kenrick's brigade had gone on, and the same day fought an all-day battle of no importance, to capture a railway station where the enemy had left a rearguard. The battalion behaved very skilfully, and slipped through a region of tiny mounds and hummocks, till near enough to rush the station; they captured a couple of hundred prisoners with little loss. That night Hart's brigade marched past them, to a place called Harbe, where the whole Hyderabad Division concentrated. A dozen days were spent here—desultory days, with standings-to before dawn, lest

the enemy try to surprise them, and with evening hates at long distance. All around were dust-heaps of a barbarism that was not particularly ancient, but had certainly been particularly filthy. On the 20th the division moved up to a wall that was in Mesopotamia long before Xenophon's time—a mighty buttress with sloping sides each way, stretching across fifty miles. The Turk was beyond this, on a plateau which was merely the sand silted on to a dead city by millenniums of desert winds.

Hart, having received his orders, called his officers together and in the impassive tones dedicated to such occasions read the impersonally worded statement of the work before them. An enemy force 'estimated at seven thousand four hundred infantry and five hundred sabres, with thirty-two guns' were occupying a position—here all scanned the rude maps that were all that could be provided, run up from such slight aeroplane reconnaissance as had been possible. They noted how at points that had not advanced beyond letters and numbers—at X5 or F7, as it might be—this or that brigade would attack. At the end Hart dismissed them, with a few words of grey colourlessness, hoping for luck on the morrow. 'Luck' was convention—yet more than a convention, since it would be needed if half of the mess were to reassemble after twenty-four hours. Everyone knew that tomorrow's fighting would be the fiercest since Maude had opened the hand-to-hand bomb and bayonet

work by which the Turk had ultimately lost all his right bank positions below Kut.

Hart, busied with matters of routine with Sinclair and Hendry, had to deal with the former's protest at being left out of the show. To the technical grounds of this decision, the fact that Sinclair had commanded the battalion in the battle to enter Baghdad, Sinclair objected that they had been comparatively lightly engaged there; it was no fair apportionment of risk that the colonel should go into action both at Sannaiyat and Istabulat, while his second-in-command was merely 'in charge of a stroll under long range shelling.' But Hart was in the mood of Falkland before Newbury. 'For myself, I shall be out of it by nightfall.' It was better that Sinclair, whose nerves were unjangled and his affections firm, a basis of solid happiness, should take over the shattered battalion when it came out of battle. Then the summer's rest would be before them; and in the autumn peace, maybe, would come. Or, if not peace, no very serious fighting. It was hard to see what reason remained for serious fighting in Mesopotamia. But Hart said nothing of all this. He stood, quietly and smilingly, on the ground that Sinclair had commanded last time.

Like many others, Hart had lived in the shadowy presence of the Mesopotamian past. In his pack he carried one book only, an *Anabasis*; that queer person Floury Baker lugged Gibbon about. As Hart lay down for the brief night's rest at foot of the

mighty Median Wall, he read Xenophon's story of coming to it. It was then twice its present height; for two thousand years it had been crumbling. He was back at school as he read; fellows whose very names he thought he had long forgotten stood out clearly in his memory. He was astonished to see how name after name, as it shone like a sudden star on the quiet darkness of thought, went out again—he would never see this fellow, he had died at Hill 60, that fellow beside him, who had made the howler about *skopeo* and *Scipio*, had fallen at Suvla Bay. Well, he himself had also finished with time, and would be with them to-morrow.

He laid by the book, and looked up; and in the last evening sunlight he seemed to see the procession of that tormented, draggled army of which he had read—that army almost as deeply civilian as our own would presently be. That rascal Tissaphernes was watching them, marching menacingly parallel. But they were free of his frightened malice, for he could not get past one man. The brave, simple Athenian whom accident had made a general was helping the Greeks onward, sometimes bullying them, sometimes 'jollying' them along. Men whose lives have been lived in libraries and lecture-rooms have despised this man, because he worshipped Artemis, the woodland queen and spirit of the moonlight-flooded night, and showed a Socrates different from the man whom Plato knew. They have understood neither Socrates

nor his friends, nor considered what strength and depth of spirit must have been with the Athenian who endured such a loneliness for so long, while ten thousand men rested securely on his courage.

All that has ever happened in time is photographed on the universe, and one day science will discover how to bring these pictures out, and develop them into the exact semblance of the sensitive life that was once theirs. We shall then not trouble to have our cinemas or any drama that has come out of a man's mind, since our theatres will be able to show us anything that has taken place, the burning of Cranmer or the victories of Napoleon. Men will be able to see the Ten Thousand coming up to the Median Wall; or the British and Indian troops who couched in its shadow before they stormed Istabulat—so recently that their friends are still living and would be moved could they witness what we have not yet learned to show.

But Hart's vision was born of his imagination; and it faded as the daylight went out. He lay awake, listening to the muffled and watchful low noises. His heart went out in a gush of such love and gratitude as he had never felt, to all the brave and gallant spirits that had lived until they had got beyond the need or desire to hear others praise them. Those men were the reality, the rest were ghosts that had walked in time and now had walked out of time for ever. He was neither lonely nor unhappy as he lay in the shelter of that enormous wall. This new mood

that had come to him was so without all reason that he compelled himself to go over the last few months, in which he had felt so differently. He was not going to be fooled now, at the finish.

For the respite at Baghdad and in the pleasant groves beyond it had deepened his sickness of spirit. He had realised how worthless is any charm or richness of country, if the people are null. Baghdad was nothing but an arid memory of a civilisation that had been arid—unmerciful, without imagination, love, or pity. He *hated* Harun al-Raschid; as was the hard, empty pomp the world admired, so was the religion on which it was built. Passing years, Hart said to himself bitterly, remind you sufficiently that you are animal, but these people in all their days were nothing else, and even to be in their midst made you conscious that you were body and appetite. Their architecture was graves, their merchandise prostitutes.

This land had drained the hopefulness out of every thinking man who had sojourned here. Julian dying had scorned as folly the philosophy by which he had lived. It was not so much that the Galilean had conquered, as that hope and valiancy had died. Xenophon had risen from sleep in those Sumaikchah wheatfields; the Athenian's eyes had brightened as they glanced over hyacinth and gladiolus and glowing emerald of massed corn-blades. But he was not condemned to stay here, he was the cavalryman earnestly thrusting ever northward, to where existence

ceased to be sand and mirage, and became firm earth and unglimmering air. Yet what had been the use of it? Historians said his march was immensely important. It showed that Asia was weak, mere bulk without strength, and that Europe could smash it to pieces. It prepared the way for Alexander. Even so . . . was it worth the physical suffering of such multitudes of men and women, to establish simply the brute strength of Europe and the equally brute weakness of Asia? We *knew* that the one was hard—had it not all through the centuries been expressing itself in system, rule, discipline, law? The Attic hoplite, the Macedonian phalanx, Roman legionary and cohort, pike and arquebus and musket, maxim, machine-gun, naval gun—that was Europe. We *knew* the other was soft—even when an Arab from the desert fused it with the heats of religion, was it not still a luxurious relaxation into sex and sensuality, a continual dreaming on lust and loot and food? It was not the people's fault that there were long periods of starvation from these things which were all that they desired.

Alexander, the historians told us, had conquered because Xenophon's men had toiled through ambush and forest and ice-cold streams and deathly snows. But had man's spirit been in any way helped forward? Alexander's victories had ended in the Ptolemies and Seleucids, in teaching the Parthians to put a sharper edge of war upon their barbarism and the

Indians to dragoon their own people into slavery. Was anything happening now because our own men had anguished through four months of incompetent leading a year ago, or were going on endlessly, from one battle to another? The agony represented by the aggregate of Shaiba and Ctesiphon and the countless combats in the twenty miles before Kut, was immense. But it was a drop in the agony of Europe, no one heeded it, it was right that no one should heed it, for it was of no importance. It did not matter how many thousand men died there, what battles were fought and won.

Yet Hart, who for so long had been troubled, could not now persuade himself into being unhappy. He was very humble, and knew that his life had failed. But he felt conscious of endless life within him, he felt that he was looking down on suffering and disillusionment that (he knew) had lately seemed all-important to him, as they still did to these others around him whom he was watching, but that now mattered nothing whatever. Nothing at all. He had strangely passed beyond the sphere of their action. He was—if we may use a simile that to the rest of the world will seem trivial, but to the English will make all clear and simple—like a cricketer who has left the wickets, and, though he has not yet laid aside bat and pads, has finished with the game and has only the sweet evening sunlight and leisure of restful watchfulness remaining.

9

Kenrick's brigade were in reserve. They had moved up a couple of hours later than the attacking brigades; as they marched through the last sunlight of the 20th to the Median Wall, a battery was firing, at steady regular intervals. The mirage, throwing their figures into a faery distance, may have shown Hart, watching by the Wall, that other march of two millenniums ago. And the same suggestion that all was already done and settled was on the scene through which they moved. At any rate, it was for Kenrick. Everything seemed methodical and automatic; men acted with the stiffness and decision of fate, as if their very arm-sweeps—this gunner officer directing his men, that forward observing officer on the top of the Wall signalling back—were predetermined.

The brigade lay down behind the Wall, scooping themselves shallow scallops in the sand. The night began, bitterly cold to men who slept in shorts and shirts, without coats or protection for their knees. All fires were kept low.

In the darkness before dawn, tea and strips of bacon were served out; men waited for the first grey streaks in the blackness of the East. As the scrub began to glimmer into some outline of distinctness, our batteries opened. Kenrick, sitting with his back against the Wall, watched the smoke flying out from the muzzles and then curving swiftly back again

on the recoil. Presently, with other officers he climbed the Wall, and lay just below the summit. The battlefield lay spread before them, a long plain level to the railway station of Istabulat, whose tall water-tower loomed up; to right of the station were high bluffs which marked a buried city. It was towards these bluffs that Hart and his brigade were to move; already another brigade still further away were moving in open order through the plunging shells, that flung skywards their dark expanding smoke-blossoms.

It was broad day when Hart's battalion, three hours later, made their thrust at the heart of the enemy position. The brigade to their right, after terrible losses, had bitten deeply into the steep redoubt and were clinging desperately to its rims, against counter-attack after counter-attack.

Kenrick watched the confused battle all day. No news came through; but men could see the shell-bursts and guess by the periods of fierce acceleration of the quickening of the torment through which their friends were passing. As dusk drew on, the firing slackened; Kenrick wandered half-right, till he found a Field Ambulance. Here were tents and tables, and wounded men; one was on a table, with sick, drawn face waiting to have his leg amputated. Lieutenant Jones, who had been Kenrick's guide that first day in Sannaiyat trenches, came up; his right arm was in a sling, and he was very subdued.

'Hart's gone,' he said. 'It's a rotten business for everyone. I'm *awfully* sorry, padre.'

He talked dazedly, as if the last hours had jangled all his values, and opened on things that had frightened even him. Kenrick listened silently, with grief swelling too strongly for speech.

'The old man was magnificent. We had the worst hell, padre, that I've ever dreamed of. We got our first objective with not too many fellows hit—thanks to the colonel. He judged our rushes and pauses as if he'd *been* in the Turco lines and *knew* what their gunners and machine-gunners were going to do. But, once we got there, they dropped on us every beastly thing that was ever invented. We lay in a gutter—you couldn't call it even a nulla—for three hours, and never saw a man to draw a bead on to. It was vilest of all when Fritz came flying low, and Lewis-gunned us. I half expected our fellows to bolt back. But we knew it would have been no good. Not a man would have crossed alive. For me,' he added thoughtfully, 'I think the ghastliest turn was the flies. I never saw such flies! The Turk's been on the ground for a solid month; and you know what his camps are like! There was a man lying dead beside me, all the time, and I had to watch the ants eating the blood off his face.'

10

It had been Hart's day. He had seen all things clearly, as in some supernatural light—the fashion of the ground and its dips and swellings, men's faces, their minds behind their faces. He had won his share of the battle at the outset, when he swung the battalion swiftly over to a crumpling of the ground that was less than a nulla, but gave them a hundred yards before the enemy could see that his ranges were all wrong and his shells falling behind his foe. The 95th had caught his pickets and bayoneted them. It was not Hart's fault that their objective, which the maps showed as the enemy first line, was only an irrigation cut, with the first line two hundred yards further.

In his last hours Hart had become a symbol. There had been about him that reckless impersonality out of which in former ages the legends of gods and heroes have been born. This spare, sardonic man, whose face was so lined and crowded with suffering, as a hillside with the storms that have ravaged its smoothness away—whose quietness so surrounded him with respect and fear, yet whose geniality came from such depths of genuine sympathy and unselfish interest—visibly defied death. Wherever there was a wavering of spirit, he showed himself, confident and gentle, before the wavering could pass into action. There is a battle sense as there is a cricket sense;

Hart had instinctively guessed at thought in its arising, as the cricketer guesses the ball's flight when it has just left the bat. Men remembered afterwards, as the man that had been Hart, his strength and calm. He had been violent only in his occasional moods of half-playful bitterness against the folly that had been set in high place to gamble with men's lives. Now, in a moment all that fell away; and men saw his long periods of silent kindness as more significant than his minutes of despairing speech.

Our guns had been rushed up in the afternoon, till in places by sheer overpowering weight of metal they blasted the enemy out of his position. Then the attacking brigades were lifted from their imperfect shelter and swept at the Turk. He held them, but not until they had torn away half his trenches. He was beaten, and fled under cover of night. His guns had gone earlier.

It was in this last attack that Hart fell. He had carried the 95th through, until they could see their enemies' faces behind their rifles. It was then that a bullet pierced his brain; his men passed on, and stormed the trench.

> 'So were the hopeless troubles that involved
> The soul of Dion instantly dissolved.'

11

Evening was quiet and exquisite; cool and unvexed, after day with its heat and pests. We were

too exhausted to press a struggle that had cost half of the infantry engaged ; and the enemy, busy slipping away, was more than content to let ill alone, lest it grow worse. Firing had long ceased when Kenrick rejoined his battalion. Floury Baker was there with Abell, waiting for him.

Floury briefly explained his bandaged head. 'Nothing. A bit of shrapnel. Only a scratch.' Then he added, 'You know Hart's gone. I got his body back. I want you to bury him.'

'I'm not a padre,' said Kenrick.

'You're the only padre he cared twopence about. I've got his grave ready in a nulla clean off the track. If we bury him where most of our graves are, the Buddoos will have him up to-morrow, when we've gone.'

As they went along, he continued. 'Johnny's practically gone already. He's got half a dozen fellows still there, but they daren't draw a bead lest we rush them. He knows that we've got enough to do licking our wounds, to keep us off him till to-morrow, if he behaves himself. Now as to Hart. Some day, when the War finishes—if the damned thing ever does finish—they'll be sending along a heavy gun in padres, a clerical major-general or bishop or somebody, to do what they call consecrating our battlefield cemeteries. I've seen it happen in France, so I know. I've nothing against it. It brings comfort and a sense of decency to some folk, and I'm

glad of it for their sakes. But myself I'd have thought, as Lincoln did, that our fellows had consecrated this place enough. Hart managed to do without padres while he was living, and I've a notion he'd just as soon lie where he'll never have anyone fussing over him or saying how fine he was to die for king and country. But he'd have liked a friend or two to see him out of sight.'

Floury had orderlies standing by with spades; but they all took a hand in filling in the grave in the end. The surface was carefully smoothed, and gravel and rubble thickly shaken over it.

For the last time—and also the first—they had seen their friend's face. The waves had fallen, this was the unmoving sea that they had hidden. As they went away they were haunted by its power and calm, and a strange happiness that shone there. He had been thought of as 'queer,' as half mad in the independent path that he took athwart accepted opinion. But they knew that to the end of their lives they would keep, deeper than any pride, too deep to show in speech to others, the strengthening self-respect of knowing that he had reckoned them as friends.

Hart had been afraid because of what he had seen in himself—or fancied that he had seen—at a time when neither God nor any merciful man would have judged him. Believing in no help outside himself, he had made no allowance for natural weakness, he had been stern to body and spirit strained beyond en-

durance. Then he had fretted because he had seen, ever more clearly, the trivial importance of events that cost men infinite suffering. They left behind them nothing; even what we call history is only a smoke-film drifting tenuously in air that is momently absorbing it into its own colourlessness. He had realised this, too simply and plainly for his peace. But what he had not realised was that, while the things on which historians fix their eyes are of small importance, are merely part of the wide, shifting illusion that we call time, what is of importance is the tiny part that belongs to each man and each woman. It mattered nothing, except as cholera or a mad tiger matters, in causing misery and ruining the body, that Xenophon had held a torch to Alexander's path of blood. But it did matter that Xenophon himself, whatever weariness of mind or body fell to his lot, never lost his watchful centre of spirit, but remained alert and eager. Even when he was an old man, he could replace the garland he had removed for a moment on hearing of his son's death, he could continue his sacrifice with the words, 'I had forgotten my son was mortal.' Judged by such a test as this, Hart would have said that his own battle was the most hopelessly lost that could be. But this —except in those moments when the spirit is shown to itself, as it was shown for Hart when preparation for death crowned him, watching those visionary soldiers—is a thing that others can judge, but never

the man himself. Hart had been a centre of calm round which the fears and disquiet of others had sunk asleep. In his self-tormenting he had kept going over the past, he had vexed himself with fears that he had sent Hugh to death because of cowardice that made him unwilling to seem to be saving the man he loved at the expense of someone he cared for less. But his friendly steadfastness during weary weeks that preceded the raid had made it for Hugh a trifling thing to go to death. Merciless in judgment of himself, Hart had not understood that all wrong that is forced upon a man by the fact that organised injustice is a flood eddying round him is a trivial matter, weighed in the eternal scales. The important thing was that in those things which were still freely within his own volition Hart had been careless of himself, careful for others.

12

Kenrick's brigade moved long before dawn; and after day had risen, for a long time dense white dust-clouds hid their columns, as they tramped through what seemed to be endless defiles. An enemy plane that came to search for them was brought down by one of our own airmen. They continued their march unmolested, and presently swung sharply to their left, and reached that part of the battlefield where the fighting had been fiercest. A long plain, extending to the foot of a many-trenched redoubt, was thickly

strewn with bodies, huddled where they had pitched forward. These Highlanders, in the dress that seemed so plainly a symbol of the hardy, frugal lives from which the summons of empire had brought them to this desert death, seemed to Kenrick a sight more horrible than all the khaki-clad dead that he had seen. These were not men uniformed and crushed into such conformity that individuality was submerged, giving way to impersonal tools, ranks and ratings, pawns of strategy and statesmanship. The Gurkhas lay beside them, short childish peasant-forms. On this battlefield you could not think of war as anything nobler than murder.

They halted near a group of gunner officers, who came up and talked eagerly of the previous day, which had been a great one for them. Kenrick saw the Loamshires, who were in a brigade that was supporting their old colleagues of the Hyderabad Division. He could not see Fletcher. He asked about him, and was told that he had gone down the line, very sick with dysentery. The last that had been heard of him was that he was in a Bombay hospital, reported to be dying. But no one knew anything certainly.

A group of staff officers rode up. The General, hearty and friendly, greeted the knot of talking officers. 'Well, well, must be pushing along now. Nothing ahead of us. The enemy is demoralised, and running. 'We shall be in Samarra for supper.'

'Is Samarra another name for Sheol, padre?' asked Major Abell of Kenrick, as the brigade got marching again.

Nevertheless, the official cheerfulness infected them; and when, as they were moving up over a long plain to a cluster of sand-mounds, two shells suddenly exploded out of a clear air, no one anticipated anything but a skirmish. Abell, the 171st's second-in-command, refused to exercise his privilege—his duty, rather—of staying out, since he had commanded in the last full-dress affair. He came along 'to see the fun.' The fun developed rapidly. The sky above the plain became smudged with woolly bursts of shrapnel, and high explosive ploughed up the sand. Bullets flew by, with little hissing spirts where they hit the sand, or whined bad-temperedly overhead. The brigade lay down, and watched their supporting artillery race up alongside the river, and take up position to fire. Other artillery came up, inland from the river; and presently the infantry rose, and marched across the front of guns in full blast, a tornado of noise that seemed as it could not fail to blow them into annihilation but swept over them and into the enemy's position. They reached steep bluffs far above the river, their hearts rejoicing to see it again. The Tigris meant comparative ease in this thirst-plagued land; and ultimately would mean a path down to the vast waterways that could bring them home.

Kenrick had wounded to dress now; and he was considering establishing his aid-post in a gnarl of broken bluff looking down on the peaceful river basking in huge bays and sickles far below, when the battalion moved out again and crossed to the mounds that they had seen when they first came under fire. The mounds ended in a wall; six hundred yards beyond was a line of half-dug trenches at which the enemy had been working feverishly. As Kenrick came up, he saw Major Abell being carried past unconscious. An over bullet had pierced his heart. But Kenrick had no time for sorrow, for the air seemed to flash into explosion round him, and there was the crack of shrapnel overhead. A sudden pain passed into immediate numbness, and he could not lift his left arm, which felt as if a sledgehammer had struck it.

His orderlies dressed his arm, and improvised a sling. When at last the battle stabilised itself somewhat and phones were laid down, he got through a message from brigade headquarters for another doctor to be sent up. But he did not arrive till after dusk, and through the afternoon Sikh orderlies under Kenrick's supervision dressed the wounded. The brigade lay out in the broken ground beyond the mounds until four in the afternoon, when for twenty minutes their supporting guns raked the Turkish lines, which the infantry went in and cleared. They went on until they stumbled on the enemy's gun-positions, taking

fourteen pieces; but counter-attacks drove them back again. Darkness was falling when another brigade came up to recapture the guns. Kenrick answered their questions as to way and direction; afterwards, for he was mad with thirst, his water-bottle having been removed with his coat when he was getting away some wounded with their effects, he went to the river-side. He felt the water with his hand. It seemed foully solid, a moving grease; he knew it must be carrying dead bodies of men and animals. Divisional advice always instructed you to draw drinking water from midstream. The advice seemed grimly humorous to the tired man. He knew that his lips moved towards a smile; then, for he was famished, he lowered them and drank fiercely.

He sat up, and for a minute looked over the blackly glimmering water. He had handed over his aid-post, and had at last been able to become a casualty himself. His arm began to pain him, and he knew that it was the cold striking to the broken bone and raw veins. It had been a bad day for the battalion, though a glorious one. Of the mess that he had joined eight months ago there remained only three; to-day's battle had cost them—for this ridiculous desert skirmish, a mere spray tossed up on the furthest and least important beach of the enormous war—seven killed, and at least as many wounded. The other ranks had gone in a bare two hundred and fifty strong; he knew that at least a hundred, most of them from the 171st, had

passed through his aid-post, and this number took no account of the dead lying out on the sands.

That muffled noise of shells exploding puzzled him. It was, it suddenly struck him, drawing nearer. He had heard it for some time and had assumed that our guns must have thought they had a target, even in the darkness. Now he grew anxious. Surely the enemy was not trying to counter-attack ? If he could have guessed how precariously and with what exiguous numbers we were clinging to the position that we had taken, he would have done.

Kenrick happened to look up ; he saw there was a glow in the sky above the high bluff which hid the river's bend from him. A brightness was beginning to burn on the river below the bluff, a long, sullen rust reddening its steel-burnished blackness. The detonations continued ; like an army they were marching steadily nearer. Kenrick, fascinated at the waterside, like a panther surprised by the lights of some festive company rowing by, saw two blazing barges reel round the bend and into sight. One was evidently loaded with shells, for it was momently bursting into fresh fierceness of flame, and tossing widely great hurtling masses, that hissed where they struck the river. The enemy had set his ammunition barges on fire, since he could not save them. It was dangerous to stay at the water's edge, but the sight was so full of sombre magnificence that Kenrick could not tear himself away.

After the barges had slowly drifted out of sight, round the next bend—burning now almost at the river's rim where it lipped their timbers—he stayed, looking across that black water and to where the lights of far Samarra town showed. Overhead was the clear Babylonian starlight that was the canopy to so many of his memories—and how often, in that starlight, had he been alone! Floating in that P boat, on his ten days' leave when he had first heard of John's death—it had seemed a desertion, to go when his comrades were expecting their own war to quicken so swiftly! He remembered that night after Sannaiyat was stormed, when he had been too tired to sleep readily and had lain amid the scents of spring grass and flowers, watching those points of light in the immensity of night's cave, where worlds were the torches. Nights on the march to Baghdad returned upon his thought, nights of slow, shuffling, broken flowing forward or of wet discomfort and insufficient slumber. The stars had shone serenely unvext above the murmuring, glare-troubled sea of tired voices and moving lamps. Memory moved closer to the present, to that night amid the soft, sweet fields of Sumaikchah, then to that muffled closing down of darkness by the Median Wall. Hart had been killed next day—two days ago now.

His arm was broken. He supposed he was out of the War for good. They would probably patch it up in time for him to go to some sort of base hospital

job somewhere, but he would not be able to do any surgical work for a long while. After that, he supposed he would return to his work in China. He would miss the warm, comfortable companionship that he had found. Though they would sing hymns about the Church of God being like a mighty army or one family, he knew that God's army was a braver thing, His family a closer friendship. When he had come out here first, he had felt the desolation of utter loneliness, and this land had been a solitude that chilled the spirit. But where would he know again the sense of tasks and dangers faced in common, that came with the sound of the colonel's quiet voice reading out the enemy's estimated numbers and the letters on the map which were points that they were to attack next dawn? He had been alone, but not lonely, when he lay outside the trenches at Sannaiyat, with the dead scattered over many acres of flower-scented young grass or tumbled against the shell-torn ditches where destruction had hurled them. All around him his friends had been sleeping in the same blanket of blood-stained, cool, fresh pasture. It was better to be on the battlefield than at the base; here their struggles were real, and the rewards immense—the respect and swift, generous comradeship of men who gave neither to fools, however ranked or beribboned.

But other thoughts, less comforting, supervened on these. He would have to return—*if* he returned

—to men who took everything for granted as before, for whom the War had been waged in a newspaper and men had died in a mist of imagined glory and of suffering quite unimaginable—though admitted, as a pedant will *admit* the majesty of Sophocles, impatient to get away from it to hapaxlegomena and annotation and crass emendation. He would be expected to step back to the same neat niche of effort, and to wear the same taut modes of dogma. There would be again orthodox and clear-cut beliefs and doctrine, in religion, still more in politics and history. He would hear people talking readily and often about the War having changed everything; but in reality they would be angry if they met anyone for whom it had changed anything except his *clichés*.

His eyes had been growing drowsy. He had no idea how long he had dozed when discomfort waked him. Sandflies had made his whole body an unclean misery, and there was a terrible and far from healthy pain in his wounded arm. He wakened in the dark with a still sharper pain of recollection, as he thought back on the nakedness to which these few months had brought him. The friends he had found were dead, faces that he had loved were mouldering skulls, those lives no longer had any hold on time except their blurring presence in memory. He had never even seen the man that John had become. The letters that had begun to reach him when they set out on this last push north of Baghdad spoke of the strength

and poise that had come to the boy—his spirit had been brought to flower, only to be broken for ever. Letters from his fellow-officers in France were not the usual conventional assurances. And to those at home who had loved him, and had leaned upon his courage and gallant cheerfulness—he was 'inexpressibly dear,' their sister had written. Now, nothing could trouble the dead boy there in Flanders, he was done with thought and feeling. So were Hart and Hugh Mackay and Abell, the men with whom Kenrick had shared danger and discomfort and fear and happiness in these deserts.

Well, it was no good sitting here. It would do no good if he got cold into this raw wound. Silly to try to worry things out now, when his eyes were red with want of sleep, his whole body stiff and miserable and dirty. He pulled himself up from the ground, and knew that he was very tired, with some film of sleep closing over brain and spirit, as well as body. He could no longer help himself in any way, he must let things go. So he stumbled back over the broken ground, towards the lights that showed where the brigade was waiting for dawn.

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